

# So Long, Insecurity

you've been a bad friend to us

BETH  
MOORE



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*For Annabeth*

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Above and beyond all else I find dear, “now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Timothy 1:17).

# Introduction

WELL, I SUPPOSE what you hold in your hands is the closest I'll ever come to an autobiography. My entire life story grows like a wild shoot from the thorny soil of insecurity. Every fear I've faced, every addiction I've nursed, every disastrous relationship and idiotic decision I've made has wormed its way out of that sorrowfully fertile ground. Through the power and grace of God, I've dealt with so many side effects of it, but oddly, until now, I've somehow overlooked its primary source.

Our family has some acreage in the uglier, flatter, and rougher side of what's generously called the Texas Hill Country. Let's put it this way: if there's a sudden rush on cactus, mesquite, and non-descript white rocks, Keith and I are sitting pretty. While I was

there recently, I got a dichotomous glimpse of myself while trudging down a rocky path, dodging thorns. I had my headphones on and my iPod blaring. My left hand, complete with wedding ring and fresh manicure, was up in the air, praising God, and my right hand was down by my side, gripping a shotgun. I know how to load it. I know how to use it. I grinned, shook my head, and thought to myself, *How on earth did this happen?*

Rattlesnakes—and not a few. They’re the reason Keith ended up setting empty soda cans on a stump, putting a shotgun in my hands, and saying, “Aim carefully, ’Lizabeth. Now lean in, steady the thing with your shoulder, and when you’re ready, shoot like you mean it.” I missed the first time, but I haven’t missed since. The way I see it, either I can get out in the fresh air and enjoy myself well equipped or I can sit in the stale house like a wimp and sulk about a path full of hazards. Throw me a shotgun. I’m not missing life over snakes.

These are perilous days to be a woman, but to be sure, they’re the only days we have and they’re passing quickly. We can sit around like victims, talk about how unfair all the gender pressure is, and grow less secure by the second, or we can choose to become well equipped and get out there and do some real living. This book is for any woman who courageously chooses the latter over her own strong compulsion of insecurity in a culture that makes it almost irresistible.

Through all the hype of our society, we’ve developed an erroneous belief system that is about as subtle as a rattlesnake. It’s time we aimed hard and shot some holes in it.

Maybe you've never read a book like this before. Maybe you don't share my belief system, but you've been drawn to open this cover because you share my battle. Glance around you. Do you see another woman? She probably shares that battle too. Regardless of our professions, credentials, or possessions, the vast majority of us are swimming in a sea of insecurity and trying our best to hide behind our goggles. In case we're thinking we'll one day outgrow the challenge, I've learned through the research for this book that chances are, we won't. Left to itself, the chronic part of the struggle may curve downward in our sixties, but insecurity could just as easily haunt us till we die. Honestly, who wants either option? In the best-case scenario, what are we supposed to do with those first fifty-nine years until we feel better?

Insecurity among women is epidemic, but it is not incurable. Don't expect it to go away quietly, however. We're going to have to let truth scream louder to our souls than the lies that have infected us. That's what this book is all about. It invites us to focus solidly on one issue that causes countless others. I hope so much you'll come along with me on this journey to authentic security. I give you my word that I'll shoot you a straight shot and won't try to manipulate you. If I have something to say, I'll just say it instead of trying to get you to swallow something you didn't realize you had on your plate. Risk it from the first page to the last, and if you honestly get to the end without an ounce of insight or encouragement, I'll pack up my books and go home. My hope is that you'll come out with something

infinitely greater, however. I want nothing less than for you to close this book *secure*.

This writing process has been unlike any other I've experienced. I'm a research freak and relish the study that goes into a book as much as the writing. Months are spent in other resources before the first word pecks its way onto the computer screen. Not this time. My search for books devoted specifically to insecurity turned up a paltry offering. More resources may have been hiding in the bushes out there, but methods of finding them that have served me well for years failed to produce. In the lack, I discovered resources that were infinitely more valuable. I turned to people as my books. Over 1,200 of them, as a matter of fact, and you might be intrigued to know that I didn't just study women. You'll have to hang with the message to see the parts men play. I think you'll find their contributions very enlightening.

Every woman's story I'll share in these pages is somehow, in some way, a piece of my own. I may not have gone to her lengths. She may not have gone to mine. But we understand each other well. We wish each other well. Perhaps now it's time to walk with each other well.

# Mad Enough to Change

I'M SERIOUSLY TICKED. And I need to do something about it. Some people eat when they're about to rupture with emotion. Others throw up. Or jog. Or go to bed. Some have a holy fit. Others stuff it and try to forget it. I can do all those things in sequential order, but I still don't find relief.

When my soul is inflating until my skin feels like a balloon about to pop, I write. Never longhand, if I can help it. The more emotion I feel, the more I appreciate banging on the keys of a computer. I type by faith and not by sight. My keyboard can attest to the fact that I am a passionate person with an obsession for words: most of the vowels are worn off. The word *ticked* really should have more vowels. Maybe what I am

is peeved. That's a good one. How about irrationally irritated to oblivion? Let that one wear the vowels off a keyboard.

The thing is, I'm not even sure exactly who I'm ticked at. I'm hoping to find that out as I hack away at these chapters. One thing is for certain. Once I figure it out, I probably won't keep it to myself. After all, you know how the saying goes: hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. And I'm feeling scorned.

But not just for myself. I'm feeling ticked for the whole mess of us born with a pair of X chromosomes. My whole ministry life is lived out in the blessed chaos of a female cornucopia. I've been looking at our gender through the lens of Scripture for twenty-five solid years, and I have pondered over us, taken up for us, laid into us, deliberated over us, prayed about us, lost sleep because of us, cried for us, laughed my head off at us, and gotten offended for us—and by us—more times than I can count. And after a quarter of a century surrounded by girls ranging all the way from kindergarteners to those resting on pale pink liners inside caskets, I've come to this loving conclusion: we need help. *I need help*. Something more than what we're getting.

The woman I passed a few days ago on the freeway who was bawling her eyes out at the steering wheel of her Nissan needs help. The girl lying about her age in order to get a job in a topless bar needs help. The divorcée who has loathed herself into fifty extra pounds needs help. For crying out loud, that female rock star I've disdained for years needs help. When I read something demeaning her ex said about

her recently—something I know would cut any female to the quick—I jumped to her defense like a jackal on a field mouse and seriously wondered how I could contact her agent and offer to mentor her in Bible study.

Several days ago I sat in a tearoom across the table from a gorgeous woman I love dearly. She has been married for three months, and they did all the right things leading up to that sacred ceremony, heightening the anticipation considerably. After an hour or so of musing over marriage, she said to me, “Last weekend he seemed disinterested in me. I’ll be honest with you. It kind of shook me up. I wanted to ask him, ‘So, are you over me now? That quick? That’s it?’”

I’m pretty certain her husband will perk back up, but what a tragedy that she feels like she possesses the shelf life of a video game.

I flashed back to another recent communication with a magazine-cover-beautiful thirty-year-old woman who mentioned—almost in passing—that she has to dress up in costumes in order for her husband to want to make love to her. I’m not knocking her pink-feathered heels, but I wonder if she is paying too much for them. I’m just sad that she can’t feel desirable as herself.

Then yesterday I learned that a darling fifteen-year-old I keep in touch with slept with her boyfriend in a last-ditch effort to hold on to him. He broke up with her anyway. Then he told. It’s all over her high school now.

I’ve got a loved one going through her third divorce. She wants to find a good man in the worst way, and goodness knows

they're out there. The problem is, she keeps marrying the same kind of man.

I'm so ticked.

If these examples were exceptions to the rule, I wouldn't bother writing, but you and I both know better than that. I hear echoes of fear and desperation from women day in and day out—even if they're doing their best to muffle the sound with their Coach bags. Oh, who am I kidding? I hear reverberations from my own heart more times than I want to admit. I keep trying to stifle it, but it won't shut up. Something's wrong with us for us to value ourselves so little. Our culture has thrown us under the bus. We have a fissure down the spine of our souls, and boy, does it need fixing.

This morning while I was getting ready for church, my cell phone nearly vibrated off the bathroom counter with six incoming texts from a single friend who was having a crisis of heart. I answered her with what little I had to give, even as I grappled with my own issues. I decided that what I needed was a good sermon to keep me from crying off my eyeliner, so I flipped on the television to a terrific local preacher. Lo and behold, the sermon was about what a woman needs from a man.

Deep sigh.

Actually, it was a great message if anyone had a mind to do what he was recommending, but knowing human nature and feeling uncharacteristically cynical, I could feel my frustration mounting. The preacher had done his homework. He offered half a dozen Scripture-based PowerPoint slides with state-of-the-art

graphics describing what men should do for women. “Women want to be told that they are captivating. That they’re beautiful. Desirable.”

I won’t deny that. What woman wouldn’t thrive under that kind of steady affirmation?

But here’s my question: What if no one tells us that? Can we still find a way to be okay? Or what if he says it because he’s *supposed* to, but to be honest, he’s not feeling it? Are we hopeless? What if a man is *not* captivated by us? What if he doesn’t think we’re particularly beautiful? Or, understandably, maybe just not every day? Are we only secure on his “on” days? What if he loves us but is not quite as captivated by us as he used to be? What if his computer is full of images of what he finds attractive, and we’re light-years from it? What if we’re seventy-five, and every ounce of desirability is long behind us? Can we still feel adequate in our media-driven society? Or is it only possible if our man has gone blind?

A guy told me the other day that normal men never get too old to eye women. Wow. Are those of us who are married to these “normal” men supposed to keep trying to compete with what’s out there? Or should we simply tell ourselves that the roving eye of a mate is harmless? I’m not being defensive. I want very much to believe that it is. But if it is, harmless to *who*?

Or what if you’re single and there’s not a man on the horizon you want to take home to Daddy? Honestly, is there no validation for our womanhood apart from a man?

I find it ironic that many of the women who defensively deny needing one single thing from a man have done one of three things: they've tried to make themselves into men, they've turned to a codependent relationship with a masculine woman, or they've done the *Sex and the City* thing by trying to beat men at their own game.

Don't tell me we don't have man-issues. After all this time in women's ministry, I won't believe you. Maybe you are the rare exception, but this I know: if you are a real, live, honest-to-goodness secure woman who is neither obsessed with a man's affirmation nor nursing a grudge against one, you did not arrive at that place by accident. None of us will.

I want to get a couple of things out on the table as fast as I can:

- 1) Men are certainly not the only source of insecurity for women. We'll wrestle with other sources on the pages that follow. But we're starting here because a woman with an unhealthy heart toward men will invariably be unhealthy in all sorts of areas, some of which extend far beyond her sexuality.
- 2) I am not a man-basher. Nothing could be further from my intent than to blame men for our problems or infer that we should divorce ourselves from them emotionally in order to survive. God would flatten me like a horsefly if I did that. I don't think any male in my life would claim that I harbor repressed anger at his

gender. (And if he did, I have a mind to hit him square in the middle of his forehead with a slingshot and a bottle of Midol.)

I'm a big fan of men. I've loved some fine ones and married my favorite one. Thirty years in, I'm still nuts about my husband and can't imagine life without him. Nobody makes me laugh like he does. Nobody makes me think like he does. Nobody has access to my heart like he does. He is worthy of my respect and gets a steady dose of it. So do my terrific sons-in-law, and if anybody on this earth is an object of my unbridled affection, it is my grandson, Jackson. I dearly love my guys and highly esteem so many others.

Men are not our problem; it's what we are trying to get from them that messes us up. Nothing is more baffling than our attempt to derive our womanhood from our men. We use guys like mirrors to see if we're valuable. Beautiful. Desirable. Worthy of notice. Viable. We try to read their expressions and moods in order to determine whether it's time to act smart and hard to get or play dumb and needy. Worse yet, we try to tap into their inner equestrian by acting like the damsel in distress. When XX meets XY and tries to pry that X away from him so she can have an extra one, she is attempting to mutate both of them.

I say this with respect and great compassion: we're attempting to get our security from a gender that doesn't really have much to spare. Our culture is just as merciless on men as it is

on women. Their insecurities take different shapes, but make no mistake: they've got them. You know it. I know it.

Let's face it. Men want us to get a grip anyway. They don't like the pressure of being in charge of our sense of value. It's too much for them. The candid ones will gladly admit it, and for those who don't, you'll know it by the flapping of their shirts in the wind as they run for their lives.

A man is infinitely more attracted to a secure woman than to an emotional wreck who insists he could complete her. As my friend Christy Nockels says, "Men are not drawn to hysterical, needy women." I'm embarrassed to say that I know this fact from personal experience. No, it's not my normal approach, but sometimes life offers me such a monumentally irresistible opportunity to act like an idiot that I cave.

I have had the blessing and curse of being married to a very honest man. Keith is the kind who has prayed for forgiveness for impure thoughts even when I was sitting right there next to him with my head bowed. Needless to say, it didn't stay bowed. There I was, thinking nothing on earth was safer or more secure than praying with my husband . . . then *bam!* Honestly, the man would not purposely injure me for the world. And goodness knows, after my first big reaction, he never did this type of prayer-confession again. He is a very loving guy. But he had no idea that one innocent comment (even about guilt, ironically enough) had the capacity to sting my self-esteem, let alone send me into all manner of vain imaginations, depending on my present frame of mind. The worst part of it is, I could

still be thinking about what he said a solid week later while he remained oblivious.

Now that's a key word that raises an important point. Are we honestly going to insist on drawing our security from people—men *or* women—who are oblivious to the inordinate amount of weight we give to their estimation of us? Seriously? Maybe others in our lives are not so clueless. Maybe they revel in the power they hold over us. Either way, are we just going to live our lives hurt and offended? The thought is exhausting. The reality is ultimately debilitating.

In countless ways, Keith has been the best medicine in the world for my terminal case of idealism, as bitter as a dose may taste. I will never forget a brief dialogue we had about ten years ago after I'd suffered a permanent fracture in a friendship. Suddenly his fairly self-sufficient woman (whom he'd married specifically because of that trait) started trying to suck the life out of him and, oddly, thought he'd be glad about it. After considerable deliberation and the careful planning of one committing herself for life, I made a brave and tearful declaration to Keith that went something like this: "I'm going to focus my attention on you. You are my best friend. In many ways, my only friend. I've decided that you are the only person on the earth I can really trust." He looked at me like a scared rabbit and said, "Baby, you can't trust *me!*" It was vintage Keith. Though he had never been unfaithful to me nor did he plan to be, it was his spit-it-out-and-prepare-for-carnage way of saying, "You can't put all your trust in me! I can't take

the pressure! I'll fail you too!" I was utterly bewildered. Back to square one.

A beautiful place to be, actually. A place I'm trying to find. Again. Maybe the person I'm ticked at is me. Maybe I'm furious at myself for needing any part of this journey for my own sake. How could I need anything else in this world beyond what I already have? Lord, have mercy. What more could a woman want? As a matter of fact, I'd like to tell you exactly what more this woman could want—and not just for herself. I want some soul-deep security drawn from a source that never runs dry and never disparages us for requiring it. We need a place we can go when, as much as we loathe it, we *are* needy and hysterical. I don't know about you, but I need someone who will love me when I hate myself. And yes, someone who will love me again and again until I kiss this terrestrial sod good-bye.

Life is too hard and the world too mean for many of us to grasp a lofty sense of acceptance, approval, and affirmation early on and keep hold of it the rest of our lives . . . come what may. Circumstances abruptly change, and setbacks happen. Relationships unexpectedly end. Or, just as cataclysmically, *begin*. Schools change. Friends change. Jobs change. Offenses happen. Betrayals happen. Tragedies happen. Engagements end. Marriages begin. Kids come. Kids go. Health wanes. Seasons change. An old situation creeping up in a new season of our life can be more complicated than ever. We can think we've murdered that monster once and for all, and then it rises from the dead and it has grown another head.

As if the battle isn't hard enough, we sabotage ourselves, submerging ourselves with self-condemnation like a submarine filling with water. How often do we think to ourselves, *I should be handling this better?* So is it okay to ask why we're not? Like, what's at the root of an ugly knee-jerk reaction?

God did not create static beings when He breathed a soul into Adam. Dynamic creatures that we are, we are ever changing and ever spiraling up—or down. Please don't misunderstand. God forbid that we live life in a vicious cycle of gaining ground and losing it. I've learned some lessons that have lasted decades, and I hope to heaven I don't ever have to relearn them. However, I've never arrived at a place where injury or uncertainty no longer issues an invitation to some pretty serious self-doubt even when I make the tough decision not to bite the bait. I still get thrown for a loop more easily than I would like and find myself in a temporary but painful setback of insecurity—one that affects me too chronically to deny that something is broken somewhere. Often when a situation warrants a minor case of injured feelings, I tend to respond with a classic case of devastation. "I know better than this," I chide. "I can't believe I've fallen for this again. My head knows good and well that this doesn't define me. Why can't I get that message to my heart?"

Listen carefully: the enemy of our souls has more to gain by our setbacks than by our succumbing to an initial assault. The former is infinitely more demoralizing. Far more liable to make us feel hopeless and tempt us to quit. We can rationalize—even truthfully—that an initial assault caught us by surprise.

Setbacks, on the other hand, just make us feel weak and stupid: *I should have conquered this by now*. I happened on a question not long ago that perfectly expresses this mentality: How many times must I prove myself an idiot?

I hate that I can still be so easily shaken, and somehow I convince myself that if I could just develop a healthy enough psyche, life couldn't touch me. I'd be completely immovable. Steady Eddie. A rock. One thing keeps nagging at me, though. A man with an incomparable heart for God once confessed, "When I felt secure, I said, 'I will never be shaken.' O LORD, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed" (Psalm 30:6-7).

Just when I'm feeling all secure, like I'm God's best friend, an earthquake splits that lofty mountain right down the middle. And boy, am I dismayed. I have a feeling we can never get so secure in ourselves that we cannot be moved. Can a rock ever move forward?

Is the goal of the believing life to get to a place where we simply hold steady till we die? Maybe that's part of my problem. Maybe I just get bored easily. I'm forever wanting to go someplace with God. I forget that in order to really want to *go*, something has to happen to make me want to leave where I am. Maybe we're all just sick to death of taking three steps forward and two steps back. Call me a math wizard, but isn't that still one step forward? Isn't that still some pretty big progress as we run against the hurricane winds of a godless culture? And if we don't lose that ground, aren't we on our

way somewhere new? Willing to take three more steps—even if we lose two?

Maybe this process is just for me. I've never written a single book out of expertise. I usually write to discover something I myself am yearning for. Even desperate for. I have given myself over to a lot of things along the way, but God help me, somebody tell me to retire when I start writing books just to talk about myself. That kind of self-importance makes me want to hang my head over a toilet. God has sustained this women's ministry with its one simple approach: I'm a common woman sharing common problems seeking common solutions on a journey with an uncommon Savior. If something hurts me, I conclude it probably hurts somebody else too. If something confuses me, I figure it probably confuses somebody else. If something helps me, I hope against hope that it might help somebody else. After all, "no trial has overtaken [us] that is not faced by others. And God is faithful" (1 Corinthians 10:13, NET).

To be honest, I don't know whether you and I are at a common place right now. I just have a hunch. See if this sounds like something that could erupt from your own pen: I'm sick to death of insecurity. It's been a terrible companion. *A very bad friend*. It promised to always think of me first and meticulously look out for my best interests. It vowed to stay focused on me and help me not get hurt or forgotten. Instead, insecurity invaded every part of my life, betrayed me, and sold me out more times than I can count. It's time I got healthy enough

emotionally to choose my lifelong companions better. This one needs to get dumped.

By the grace and power of God, I've had the exhilarating joy of winning many battles, some of them against no small foes. I've experienced dramatic victory over sexual sin, addiction, unhealthy relationships, and other equally fierce opponents. But I have not won this particular battle against the stronghold of insecurity. *Yet*. God help me, I'm going to. This one's too sinister and deeply woven into the fabric of my female soul to deal with amid a bagful of other strongholds. Thank God, a time comes in a willing life when you're ready to face a Goliath-sized foe all by itself and fight it to the stinking death.

You hold in your hands one woman's quest for real, lasting, soul-changing security. I'd be honored if you care to join me.

# Notes

1. Interviews of 953 respondents done by Adrienne Hudson, statistician, November 2008, Living Proof blog site.
2. Joseph Nowinski, *The Tender Heart: Conquering Your Insecurity* (New York: Fireside Publishers, 2001), 23.
3. *Ibid.*, 23–24.
4. Taken from “Mostly Late at Night” by Kate Crash; quoted in “Poet Turned Songwriter: An Interview with Kate Crash,” *Carpe Articulum Literary Review* (March–April 2009).
5. Nowinski, *The Tender Heart*, 57.
6. Michael Levine and Hara Estroff Marano, “Why I Hate Beauty,” *Psychology Today* (July/August 2001): 41.
7. Sermon at Houston First Baptist Church, April 26, 2009.
8. *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).
9. Richard Winter, *Perfecting Ourselves to Death* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 125–126.
10. Original source: Terry D. Cooper, *Sin, Pride and Self-Acceptance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 166.
11. *Word Biblical Commentary*, volume 22 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 243.

12. Lexical *hadar* (pronounced *hub-DAR*), *Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1996), OT Lexical Aids, #2077, 1511.
13. Joseph Nowinski, *The Tender Heart*, 138.
14. *Ibid.*, 139.
15. Rob Jackson, "Confronting Your Spouse's Secret Sin," <http://www.pureintimacy.org/piArticles/A000000483.cfm> (last accessed September 4, 2009).
16. This Scripture quotation is taken from *God's Word*.<sup>®</sup> *GOD'S WORD*<sup>®</sup> is a copyrighted work of God's Word to the Nations. Quotations are used by permission. Copyright 1995 by God's Word to the Nations. All rights reserved.
17. Jennifer Rothschild, *Me, Myself, and Lies* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2008), 119.
18. Cooper Lawrence, *The Cult of Celebrity* (Guilford, CT: Skirt Publishers, 2009), 233.