

John is such a good guide for this common struggle. It turns out that we can do more than simply live with our insecurities and hope to hide them. Instead, we can listen to God, take a stand against them, and grow in wisdom.

Edward T. Welch

Counselor & Faculty at Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation,  
Author of *When People Are Big and God is Small, Running Scared, and  
Shame Interrupted*

When it comes to effective communication with young people, you need someone who has a relatable voice. In *Insecure*, John Perritt has put together something quite special: a funny, poignant, ground-level, and gospel-centered work that will no doubt be of great benefit to any student walking the halls of school.

Shelby Abbott

Speaker and author of *Pressure Points: A Guide to Navigating Student Stress*

There may be no bigger problem in the lives of today's young people than insecurity. The shame, awkwardness, and embarrassment of insecurity are perpetual and paralyzing. John Perritt gets it. With wisdom, transparency, and faithful maturity, he helps students combat the ugly feelings of insecurity with gospel grace.

Jacquelle Crowe

Author of *This Changes Everything: How the Gospel Transforms the Teen Years*

John Perritt has written an important and timely book on insecurity, the root cause of many of the poor choices teens, and adults for that matter, make. Grounded in scripture, John's words remind us where our true value comes from. It's

a lesson we can all take something from, especially today, in a world where self-worth is so closely linked with social media likes and comments.

Chad Gibbs

Author of *God & Football* and *Jesus Without Borders*

Written for students, but useful for everyone! What Perritt does so vulnerably through his own story is help us understand where our insecurities stem from. By identifying the sin driving our fears, he then helps us shift our eyes off of self and onto the One whom our security and rest is found.

Kristen Hatton

Author of *The Gospel-Centered Life in Exodus*, *Face Time: Your Identity in a Selfie World*, and *Get Your Story Straight*

John Perritt is a sound Biblical theologian, a thoughtful pastor, an astute observer of culture and perhaps most of all a loving father. All of these aspects make *Insecure* a very important book to read and an invaluable resource for students and those who love and work with them. I highly recommend it as a university campus pastor and as father of three.

Richie Sessions

RUF Campus Minister

As a father trying to tackle these issues on a daily basis, I simply can't wait to give John's book to my own kids. It's readable, relevant and real.

Dan Strange

Director, Oak Hill College, London

**JOHN PERRITT**

# **INSECURE**

**FIGHTING OUR LESSER FEARS  
WITH A GREATER ONE**

CHRISTIAN  
**FOCUS**



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*To all the students who live in fear  
as you walk down the halls of your school  
or enter a room crowded with people.*

*Christ is waiting with open arms  
and has purchased a place  
of unending joy, peace, and security.*

*I pray this book gives you a small taste of what's to come.*



# Introduction

*One of the sad burdens many of us carry in this life comes to us when we accept the lie that our worth is determined by what other people think. This is an incredible power we hand over to others, many of whom never even know we have given it to them.*

Russ Ramsey<sup>1</sup>

I really don't intend to start this book off with an arrogant tone, but here it goes. I am probably the best person to write this book. I know, it sounds so arrogant, doesn't it?

I don't know about you, but when I read an article or pick up a book, I want to know a little bit about the author. More specifically I want to know why I should listen to them. I'm thinking, *What sort of expertise does this person have to speak on this subject? How are their thoughts and opinions more authoritative than another's?*

Well, I can assure you that I am a master of insecurity. I try not to brag, but insecurity just comes natural to me. I guess you

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<sup>1</sup> Russ Ramsey, *Struck: One Christian's Reflections on Encountering Death* (IVP Books, 2017), p. 59.

## INSECURE

could say it's a gift? I think too much about my appearance. I'm too aware of the sound of my voice. Naturally, I wonder what other people are thinking about me. And, more often than not, I'm nervous in most social settings because I'm just so ... insecure.

Here's the deal though. I don't want to be insecure. I don't like feeling insecure. I want to stop being insecure. And, if you're reading this book, I'm pretty sure you'd agree. No one gets out of bed in the morning longing to be insecure. *Oh, I just can't wait to feel uncomfortable today! I hope I cower in the school halls! I just love looking in the eyes of all these people that are better than me.*

I'm not content feeling insecure and I'm pretty sure you're not either. In fact, let me say it a bit more strongly: as a child of Christ we must strive to fight our insecurity.

I was reluctant to say that, because I might have just added feelings of guilt to your feelings of insecurity. Sort of like Rex, the insecure dinosaur from *Toy Story*, 'Great! Now I have guilt!' This was the exclamation he made after discovering that Woody was telling the truth when all the other toys accused him of being a liar – his insecure T-Rex frame could hardly handle the one-two punch of insecurity *plus* guilt.

Therefore, that's not what I'm trying to do to you. Let me say it this way: I want to help us both in our feelings of insecurity. And talking about it openly is a step in the right direction.

Not too long ago, I taught some of this content to hundreds of teenagers at Reformed Youth Ministries' summer

## *Introduction*

conferences.<sup>2</sup> Part of me was hesitant to talk on insecurity, because I was so insecure. However, I was deeply encouraged by the Lord using my story to help others in their own story of insecurity. And, what I also discovered, was the fact that insecurity is such a common struggle for everyone – which, I hope, encourages you to know that you're not alone.

Therefore, much of this book is my story. You see, insecurity is painful and there was a lot of pain I experienced in junior high and high school from these feelings. However, it's encouraging how the Lord can use my painful experiences to assist others in their discomfort and that's one thing I wish I had when I was a teenager. I wish I had someone say, 'I understand.' I wish I was able to share my insecurities with others and have them respond with, 'I struggle with the same things.' It would have been such a comfort to know that I wasn't alone. So, if you get nothing else from this book, know that *you are not alone in your struggle*. Most likely, every one of your friends is struggling in the same way.

So, let's get started. Let's struggle together against this thing we call insecurity ...

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2 <https://www.rym.org/conferences>



# PART 1

# CONTEMPLATING

# INSECURITY



# 1. Confessions of a Loser: *Defining Insecurity*

There I was, sitting in my tenth grade geometry class all alone. Well, I wasn't entirely alone. There were a couple of other losers in the classroom. I know that sounds harsh, but that's exactly how they were viewed among the student body. Why were we alone in our geometry class? Because it was our morning break and most people were in the foyer socializing. And, if I were out in the school foyer socializing, it wouldn't be much of a break for me – it would have been exhausting.

There were times when I would venture out into the masses of people, but I felt much more *secure* around the other losers in the room. Let me be clear, I do not call them losers in a condescending way; I liked them. Do you know why I liked them? Because they made me feel safe, secure.

The losers in the classroom couldn't take security from me like the 'élites' in our school could. The losers in my school couldn't make me feel embarrassed the way the popular people could. In short, the losers didn't have power over me.

## INSECURE

Why did I choose to stay in the geometry class? Okay, if you really want to know, let me give you a bit of my story.

### WHY AM I INSECURE?

Well, I already identified myself as a loser ... which isn't entirely true. To be honest, I've been quite 'popular' my entire life. Now, let me define popular a minute. I was never completely accepted in the popular crowd, although I hung out with the popular crowd at various times. What I mean by popular, was that I was pretty much universally liked in my school.

Without a doubt, there were people who did not like me. I had my haters. But, by and large, the losers liked me. The popular people liked me. The potheads liked me. The jocks liked me. I was pretty well-liked.

One thing my insecurity taught me was how to make people like me. I remember Jason Alexander (the guy who played George Costanza in *Seinfeld*), explaining how he became so funny. Since he was short and chubby – his words – he learned a quick wit. That is, he knew people would most likely make fun of him, so he beat them to the punch. He made fun of himself. Before the 'mean people' could make jokes about him, he had already made the joke. Not only did this defuse any harm they could lob towards him, it also made him the 'funny guy'.

This is what I learned. Yes I was somewhat funny, not the funniest guy you'll ever meet but I learned what people wanted to hear. I learned people's likes and dislikes and catered to them. Therefore, I got really good at making people like me and being the person others wanted me to be. However, that inadvertently made me insecure. That ability made me very

self-focused and constantly wondering what others thought of me. And, if we were to picture insecurity as a building, a focus on self would be its sure foundation.

So, not only did I acquire the talent of being a people-pleaser but there were some other factors that came into play.

## JUNIOR HIGH

Seventh grade was a great year on the one hand, but a very rough year as well. My entire life I grew up going to a private school that was fairly small. However, in seventh grade I transitioned to a fairly large public school. Needless to say, most of the mornings I woke up with an upset stomach, for the first few months, at least. I was so nervous about going to school. In many ways it was quite miserable.

Add to that, there were some classmates who made life pretty rough. One classmate in particular would pick on me quite often. To be more specific, he would pick on my appearance. He made fun of my ears. He made fun of my knees. He made fun of my elbows. He made fun of my voice. You name it ... he mocked it.

In many ways, he greatly assisted my sin in making me self-aware. That is, our sin turns us inward and makes us focus on self. Two famous theologians, Augustine and Martin Luther, talked about humanity being curved in on itself, and this is what they meant. Therefore, my sinful nature has the tendency of being selfish, but now there was also this person in my life making me so aware of the physical appearance God gave me and how it was ‘imperfect’ by this classmate’s standards.

A man named Dr. Mike Emlett says something that’s very helpful on this point. He says that every human is ultimately

## INSECURE

‘a saint, a sinner, and a sufferer.’<sup>1</sup> That is, we are *saints* because God’s grace is seen through each person. We are *sinners*, because Adam’s sin spread to us. And, we are *sufferers* because other people sin against us.

In seventh grade I was a **saint** because God’s grace could be seen through my talents and gifts. In seventh grade I was a **sinner** because Adam’s sin spread to me; and my thoughts, words, and deeds were tainted with sin. In seventh grade I was a **sufferer**, because some people made life a living hell, literally.

I was physically ill many mornings, because I was terrified of what someone would say about my body. Add to this insecurity the fear of crying. I guess you could say that God gifted me with a sensitive nature (it didn’t always feel like a gift). This only magnified my insecurity, because, God-forbid I break down crying in seventh grade over bullying. That would only make matters worse for a twelve-year-old boy.

## HIGH SCHOOL

So, I carried this insecure baggage with me into the tenth grade, where another factor came into play. I was diagnosed with *attention deficit disorder* (ADD).

Keep in mind that in 1996, people weren’t diagnosed with ADD as often as they are today.<sup>2</sup> I was a fairly isolated case in my grade and was utterly ashamed that this knowledge might become public, therefore, I kept this pretty secret. I can only

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1 Dr. Michael R. Emlet, *CrossTalk* (New Growth Press, 2009), p. 74.

2 I know this is a sensitive subject for many. Please know that I do not say that to imply that it is over-diagnosed today, I’m simply stating how it was back then.

remember finally opening up about this to some very close friends, but I swore them to secrecy.

An added bonus to this diagnosis was the medicine they gave me. Some of the side-effects were loss of appetite, insomnia and, you guessed it, anxiety. I experienced all three of these.

A core component to insecurity is obviously anxiety. At this point, I'm insecure with the way I look, insecure with the way I talk, insecure about my ADD. Now I'm pouring fuel on the fire by taking a pill *every day* that makes you anxious. Don't forget that I'm a sinner, as well, so if you've ever seen the movie, *The Perfect Storm*<sup>3</sup>, that was pretty much being filmed in my heart at this point.

## **WHAT IS INSECURITY?**

Fast-forward to today and I'm still battling many of the same old insecurities. I struggle with vanity because I'm self-focused and I'm self-focused because I was picked on in the seventh grade (I know my sin factors in, too – more on that later). I'm insecure because I don't think I'm smart enough and much of that is rooted in my ADD.

But, what exactly is insecurity? Well, here are a few things we can identify from my story.

### **• Insecurity is Self-focused**

We are insecure because we are focused on self. Anyone with common sense realizes their self is broken. There's something they don't like about the way they look or the way they think.

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<sup>3</sup> If you haven't seen it, don't bother ... it's not that great. It's loosely based on a true story about a storm and it stars George Clooney and Mark Wahlberg.

## INSECURE

Therefore, a focus on self isn't going to foster much security, because our selves are so fragile. Even the arrogant guy or girl is insecure, because they know something deep down isn't whole – this is something we'll discuss more in detail. The point is, insecurity draws us to focus on self.

- **Insecurity is Sinful**

We are insecure because of our sin and therefore our insecurity is sinful. I know this might sound harsh, but it is a truth we must come to accept. I do not say this to beat you up; rather, I say this to help you see and understand more clearly what it is we are dealing with. As already stated, this is something we will get into more detail on later, but go ahead and swallow this pill.

- **Insecurity is a form of Anxiety**

We are anxious because of our insecurity. This is very similar to the above point, but slightly nuanced. Scripture clearly teaches that anxiety/worry is sinful (Matt. 6:25-34). Sometimes people identify themselves as a ‘worrier.’ Because of this, they have become content to simply live life with this sin. However, they don't really see it as a sin, perhaps they think of it more as a character flaw. The same goes for insecurity. People just assume it's a natural part of life they must grow accustomed to, but you don't. By God's grace, you can fight this.

- **Insecurity is Suffering**

We are insecure because other people sin against us. Not only are we sinful, but others are sinful and sin makes people evil. People say mean things and do mean things to us that make us insecure, and it hurts. Some of you reading this right now

may be suffering due to your insecurity. Maybe some people make it miserable to walk down the halls of your school. It is my prayer that beginning to reflect on insecurity however, may ease this suffering in your life.

### **• Insecurity is Curable**

If we believe that insecurity is sinful, and we know that Jesus Christ defeated sin, then insecurity is defeated. This is why I said I'm not trying to guilt-trip you over labeling insecurity as sinful. God killed sin by coming to this earth, nailing sin to the cross, and rising from the grave. The misery of insecurity is a defeated sin and you possess the power to deal with it. If that's not good news, I don't know what is.

As we continue in this book, we will seek to define and understand what insecurity is. As of now, keep in mind the fact that insecurity is self-focused and sinful, but sin has been defeated by Jesus Christ. Now, before you move on, why not think about your own story? Why are you insecure?

## **TAKE SOME TIME**

*What are you insecure about? Your lack of gifts in certain areas? Your body? Your brain?*

*How are you self-focused?*

*Are there people in your life that pick on you and make life miserable? How have they fed your insecurities? Chances are, they are acting out of their insecurities. How can you pray for them?*

## INSECURE

### PRAY:

Ask God to help you see your sin with this issue, but ask Him to help you see ways in which people have said things that hurt you. Know that Jesus cares more about you than anyone and He wants you to talk to Him about your insecurities.