

How can you use your body to glorify God? How can you be a vessel of God's love, power, and grace?

Chapter 9

Inner Beauty

Truth #2: Pretty girls are a dime a dozen. Outer beauty attracts attention, but inner beauty is what holds it.

Amanda couldn't figure out what her problem was. Getting boyfriends was ridiculously easy, but hanging on to them was another story.

Since her sixteenth birthday two years ago, she'd had seven serious relationships. They all followed the same pattern: She'd meet a guy who was crazy about her. They'd date seriously for three or four months. Then out of the blue, he'd back off and say he needed "space."

Amanda hated the word *space*. It made it sound like she was suffocating them, when it was always her boyfriends who came

on strong. At least at first they did. And that is what confused Amanda.

Why did they always start off obsessed and attentive, then lose interest once they knew her? Was it the commitment that scared them off—or was something wrong with her?

Amanda knew she was beautiful. People complimented her looks all the time—so often, in fact, it got old. Whenever she went to a restaurant or shopping, men would stop and stare, and some of her friends had a problem with that. They said it made them feel invisible, and it was better for their self-esteem if Amanda stayed home.

Those comments hurt, but when you're beautiful, people think they can say anything because you're confident enough to take it. Only Amanda wasn't confident, and that's why she liked hanging around the guys. Unlike females, they didn't tear her down. They didn't get jealous over petty things or try to undermine her.

Lately, however, even boys had disappointed Amanda. Her last boyfriend dumped her for another girl, and the one before him accused her of being boring and vain.

"You're dumb as rocks!" he screamed in their final fight. "Maybe if you spent less time in front of the mirror, you'd get a personality!"

Amanda had thrown a shoe at him, screaming back that *he* was the one who insisted she look hot every time they went out. This boyfriend liked treating Amanda to expensive gifts and fancy dates, and in return he wanted Amanda to "make him look good."

She'd done him a favor, and to insult her for that took a lot of nerve.

Amanda was tired of being used. She'd had enough of investing everything in relationships and getting kicked to the curb. Was she dating the wrong guys, or were they all commitment-phobes? Was she foolish to hold out hope that a boy would ever stay?

Something had to change, but what? Amanda couldn't quite figure that out.

"BUT THE LORD SAID TO SAMUEL, 'DO NOT CONSIDER HIS APPEARANCE OR HIS HEIGHT, FOR I HAVE REJECTED HIM. THE LORD DOES NOT LOOK AT THE THINGS PEOPLE LOOK AT. PEOPLE LOOK AT THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE, BUT THE LORD LOOKS AT THE HEART."

(1 SAMUEL 16:7)



WHAT'S BEHIND YOUR STOREFRONT WINDOW?

There is no denying that beauty opens doors.

Being pretty gets you noticed. It attracts boys. People are

more likely to smile at you for no reason and listen when you speak. Should you get pulled over for speeding, you might be able to sweet-talk your way out of it. Without a doubt, being pretty has its perks.

But all too often with girls, appearance becomes overly valued and too important. You can channel so much time and energy into your looks you neglect the hidden parts of you that possess more value, like your personality, talent, smarts, sense of humor, and spiritual life.

What results is a dazzling shell that's hollow inside. While the package may look attractive, there is very little substance below the surface.

What you should know is this: *Being pretty isn't enough. Being hot isn't enough. Being flawless and physically perfect isn't enough.* Pretty girls are a dime a dozen, and unless you have other things in your favor, you won't stand out for long.

In Amanda's story, the root problem was her overreliance on her looks. Since that is what people marveled over, she mistakenly believed it was her best asset and focused hard on it. Like many beautiful girls, Amanda "put it all in the storefront window." She was all about the display and presentation.

But think about the storefront windows you see while shopping. When you run across one that is spectacular, aren't you especially excited to see what's inside? Don't you hope the interior matches the exterior—or better yet, surpasses it?

And when you walk in and discover a dull interior, how do you feel? Disappointed? Letdown? Antsy to move on? Maybe the

store is boring. Maybe there's dead space. Maybe the environment is cold and intimidating—not the kind of place you want to hang out.

Whatever the case, it is not enough that the storefront window catches your eye from the street. How comfortable you feel *inside* the store is what keeps you coming back.

People are the same way. Your appearance is a starting point, an invitation for others to look closer. The most beautiful people have interiors that outshine their exteriors, exceeding anyone's expectations.

They are first and foremost beautiful souls.

Let's be clear: appearance is important. To boldly serve God, you need to be happy with how you look, and that begins with taking care of the one body you've been given. When you are put together, people can take you seriously. They're more willing to follow you, take a chance on you, and help you reach your dreams.

But there comes a point where enough is enough. Looking good could be a full-time job, and for some girls it is.

When this becomes your lifestyle choice, however, you fail to cultivate the rich interior life you need to find true happiness and intimacy with God. You attract friends and guys who are equally caught up in appearances, which makes for shallow and flimsy relationships.

That was Amanda's other problem: the boys she drew weren't the type to appreciate a girl's depth and authenticity; they were boys who chase anything that makes their eyes pop out. You can't

count on these guys because there will always be another storefront window that comes along and outshines yours.

Being pretty, hot, or physically perfect isn't enough. And when your display is your obsession, the mystery behind the curtain gets neglected or, worse yet, forgotten.

“CHARM IS DECEPTIVE, AND BEAUTY IS FLEETING; BUT A WOMAN WHO FEARS THE LORD IS TO BE PRAISED.”

(PROVERBS 31:30)



HOW YOU ACT IMPACTS HOW PEOPLE SEE YOU

When I started college, I got a crash course on beauty that changed my lens forever.

From day one on campus at the University of Alabama, I was blown away by all the gorgeous girls. Everywhere I looked there were knock-outs, girls to suit any taste or preference: tall, short, curvy, lean, blonde, brunette, glamorous, natural—you get the idea.

It was an intimidating set-up, especially when I considered how freshman girls outnumbered freshman boys. As I thought about the dates I hoped to have, and calculated the odds stacked against me, I wondered how I was supposed to compete.

During the next four years, I found out. Above all, I learned that beauty is a running tally influenced by a girl's choices. You see, *how a girl acts impacts how people see her.*

When you show love, like comforting a friend during a break-up, you become more attractive. Your beauty quotient rises. But when you act selfishly, choosing instead to pursue your friend's ex-boyfriend, your beauty quotient drops.

It really is that simple.

A lot of outwardly beautiful girls make themselves ugly by acting catty, vindictive, or promiscuous. They start as a ten and fall to a seven on the beauty scale as their true colors show. Then there are girls with so much character and inner light that they transform from a seven into a ten. Once you know them, a deeper beauty shines through.

This deeper beauty is God's presence. When you reveal your godliness to others, they notice it and feel it. They crave your company and see you through new, enlightened eyes.

This is why an eighty-year-old grandmother can be the most beautiful creature on earth to her grandchild. It's why you may suddenly be attracted to a guy you never found attractive before, because one life-changing conversation stirred up something wonderful and miraculous inside you.

There are two types of beauty: beauty in the eye and beauty in the mind. While the eye's opinion matters initially when a first impression is made, the mind's opinion stands the test of time.

The better you know someone, the less their appearance

matters. Even their most arresting features don't grab you like before.

The best part of you—or anyone else—isn't readily apparent. Even if you won the genetic lottery and look like a supermodel, this holds true. While the world pushes physical perfection, pressuring you to chase the eye's approval, God looks deeper.

God's primary concern is not your body, which will expire one day, but your soul, which lives forever.

“THEREFORE WE DO NOT LOSE HEART. THOUGH OUTWARDLY WE ARE WASTING AWAY, YET INWARDLY WE ARE BEING RENEWED DAY BY DAY.”

(2 CORINTHIANS 4:16)



THE BEAUTY OF LOVING YOURSELF

I've discussed vanity, but for most girls, the big issue with beauty is insecurity.

In some way, we all doubt God's handiwork. We question the way He built us. We admire other women and wish we looked like them. If we're short, we wish we were tall. If our hair is

curly, we wish it was straight. If we're brunette, we wish we were blonde. If we're big-boned, we wish we were thin.

The wish list never ends, does it?

Then there's that bully in our head, the ruthless inner critic who seeks to destroy. I don't know about yours, but mine is sharp and mean. He knows my weak points and how to target them. Where I'm sensitive and easily hurt, that's where he strikes. I have to stay on guard against my bully and know when he's attacking me, because otherwise he'll cut straight to my heart.

Your inner critic can cause tremendous harm, and it's important you understand this. Since he's aware of vulnerabilities you'd never admit to anyone, he can go for the kill. All criticism hurts, but that voice between your ears can absolutely destroy you. Whether you believe or dismiss his lies brings death or life into your soul.

As I mentioned earlier, that unforgiving voice in your head isn't the voice of God; it's the voice of the devil. God would never speak to you with such harsh, unkind, and unloving words. So instead of handing your inner bully a megaphone, make a point to muzzle him. Remember that *you control him*, and the reason he'll pull any stop to beat you down is because he doesn't want you to serve God.

By turning you against yourself, he messes with your confidence. He keeps you from seeing yourself in a favorable light so you'll want to retreat into your shell and hide instead of stepping out in faith to change the world.

So how do you conquer your inner bully? How do you turn

self-doubt into self-love? How do you embrace yourself and find confidence even as you work through an issue that has you down—like trying to reach a healthy weight, treating your acne, or growing out a tragic haircut?

This is how: *By showing yourself grace. By seeing yourself through God's loving, merciful eyes. Remember, you are His child. He made you in His image and is PROUD of the result. God loves you equally at your best and your worst, and with His help you can replace the negativity in your head with hope, love, and truth. His love endures forever (Psalm 136).*

When you look in the mirror, find reasons to praise God. Let your eyes magnify what's right and minimize what's wrong. Take captive every thought you have, and make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

loop of confidence, self-destructive ones create a cycle of insecurity that's hard to break.

Decide now to love yourself through God's eyes. Silence your inner bully by keeping his motive in mind. Ask yourself if you'd ever speak to a friend the way you speak to yourself. If the answer is no, take it as a sign to change your self-talk. There is beauty in all God's creation, and that creation includes you. By recognizing yourself as His masterpiece, made by the same hands that created the oceans, the sun, and every bird in the sky, you can see yourself through the proper lens, one that evokes awe toward Him.

“THOSE WHO LOOK TO HIM ARE RADIANT; THEIR FACES ARE NEVER COVERED WITH SHAME.”
(PSALM 34:5)



Quick Quiz: Does Your Appearance Rule Your Social Life?

For months you've counted down the days until your friend's birthday bash. Her parents have planned a lavish celebration with a band, fireworks, and three hundred guests.

Your mind is going to chatter. It will speak love, hate, and everything in between. The thoughts you entertain form a track on which your self-esteem runs. While godly thoughts create a

The day of the party, however, you don't want to go. First of all, you look terrible in your new dress because your stomach is bloated from that time of the month. Second, your eyes are puffy from crying after a fight with your mom. Third, you woke up this morning with a zit the size of Texas on your chin.

What do you do?

- A. You skip the party. After all, you can't go out in public in this condition. People will talk! You'd be a drag anyway, and that's unfair to your friend. With all those guests there, she won't notice your absence.
- B. You find another dress to wear, fix your eyes with makeup, and go to the party. Even though you don't feel like being social, you make yourself have fun. This is your friend, after all, and it's only right to support her.
- C. You wear sunglasses to the party, sulk in the corner, and spend the night thinking about how your friend owes you for this sacrifice you've made.
- D. You look in the mirror and tell yourself what

you need to hear: "Snap out of it! Tonight isn't about you. It's about the birthday girl!"

If you answered "B" or "D," you're thinking correctly. You've put your friend over a bad hair day and the bad attitude that can result. All of us have days we don't want to leave the house, but sometimes we have to. Sometimes we have to get over our issues and insecurities to show up for the people we love.

A friend's birthday party is always a special event. Even if three hundred guests come, your friend will notice—and remember—who is and isn't there.

WHAT'S A HEALTHY SELF-IMAGE?

A girl I know got liposuction at age nineteen because her mom insisted. Her mom wanted her to be a beauty queen, and since this girl was naive, she went along with it.

Her mom isn't a terrible person, and in many ways she's a loving parent. But what this shows is how the pressure to look perfect and fit a mold can come from anyone—even those closest to you.

That is why you need to understand what a healthy self-image

is. You can't rely on the world's opinion because humans get it wrong sometimes. Only God is completely accurate. Only God can tell you the truth, and nothing but the truth, about your beauty.

When I was your age, I loved *Teen* magazine. *Teen* is where I learned about fashion, boys, and makeup because the Internet didn't exist. As much as I loved flicking through the magazine, however, it always triggered some deep insecurities. The images made me feel less than, inadequate, and not enough. After all, the models were flawless. Compared to them, I felt pitiful. I can't tell you how many hours I spent staring at their pictures, trying to figure out what their secrets were so I could achieve their level of beauty.

My thoughts sounded like this:

Her eyes are perfectly symmetrical. How do I get my eyes like that?

How do I make my thin hair thick like hers?

I wish my legs were that skinny!

I'd kill for her stomach!

Even her toes are perfect!

Suffice it to say, my model study sessions never ended well. They brought me down and discouraged me because I wanted to look *exactly* like them and *nothing* like me.

Fortunately, my *Teen* magazine came only once a month. That gave me a break from the models, a stretch of several weeks where I could forget about the gap between their beauty and mine.

But you? You live in a different time. You're reminded of that gap *every day*. In addition to airbrushed photos of movie stars on

the Internet, you see filtered pictures of your friends and peers all over social media. Every time you scroll down, you see someone putting their best foot forward, showing the one picture out of twenty attempts that captured a perfect moment.

And when you see these perfect moments, you assume other girls have perfect lives. You wonder what their secrets are, because judging by appearances, they have the answers.

But guess what? They don't. Just like you, every girl out there is searching. She's measuring herself against someone she thinks is prettier, happier, or better off than she is. She's studying pictures to see who has all the answers. She's feeling less than, inadequate, and not enough.

Do you see the cycle? Do you see why girls become jealous, insecure, and competitive? When you think someone has the secrets you want, you tend to resent them. That resentment builds walls instead of bridges and turns girls into threats instead of allies.

A healthy self-image starts with love and compassion—for yourself and others. It looks for common ground. Beneath our appearances, we all share the same emotions:

- Joy and sadness
- Hope and fear
- Gratitude and anger
- Courage and self-doubt
- Empathy and indifference
- Certainty and confusion

Every girl you know is in the same boat as you. You all face pressures to look perfect. You all share an unspoken understanding of how hard it is growing up. And when you focus on your common core, you quit feeling threatened. You see yourselves as allies and stop the constant comparisons.

Once the comparisons stop, real progress begins. You no longer feel superior to some girls and inferior to others. God created you with great intention and attention. No detail is a mistake because God doesn't make mistakes. While there will always be parts of your appearance you wish to change, it's what you do with those wishes that affects your self-esteem.

If you fixate on the traits you want to change, jumping on the "wish" train every time it passes ("I wish I had a fast metabolism," "I wish I had her nose"), you'll live with an anxious, dissatisfied heart. You'll fool yourself into believing that one day you'll arrive at your destination, a place where you can accept what you see at last because your flaws have been perfected.

This destination doesn't exist, of course, and that is why this mind-set is unhealthy. When you chase perfection, there is no end in sight, no place to get off, no reprieve for your anxious heart.

But if you let Jesus fill your gap, that void between where you are and where you wish to be, you find peace *exactly* where you are. You don't jump on every "wish" train or live for the day you'll finally accept yourself, because you accept yourself now—even if there's room to improve, even if you're working toward positive

changes, even if you don't fit beauty stereotypes. The heart of a healthy self-image is self-love, and the heart of self-love is God. When you feel less than, inadequate, and not enough, you're thinking with the mind of the world. Think instead with the mind of God. Define beauty as *variety* and marvel over God's genius, revealed by His making no two people the same.

You were made to be perfectly you—and no one else. While the world wants to box you in, imposing standards and expectations, God will set you free. His concern is to get you heaven-ready, not magazine-ready, and as you embrace this reality, you form a healthy self-image that's based on truth, love, and God's abundant grace.

"IT'S HEALTHY TO BE CONTENT, BUT ENVY CAN EAT YOU UP."

(PROVERBS 14:30 CW)

FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOUR SOUL

Life is so very short. Even if you live ninety years, that's a blip compared to the infinite time you'll spend in eternity.

When you die, your outer beauty dies with you. It's buried six feet under. At your funeral, people won't be talking about

your sculpted abs, your bleached teeth, or your lush eyelashes (at least I hope not). They'll talk about what kind of person you were and how you touched their lives.

So ask yourself, "What do I want said at my funeral? What value am I adding to the lives around me?" Does your outer beauty make anyone a better person? Does it feed someone's soul the way a soul longs to be fed?

How you make others feel *inside* is what sets you apart from other girls. That is what makes you the girl a guy can't live without. While physical attraction is important, it isn't the force that will make your husband-to-be imagine a *future* together, a lifelong journey filled with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

The most beautiful girls inspire others and lift them up. They are first and foremost beautiful souls. Since it's the quality of your soul, not your flesh, that determines where you spend eternity, pay attention to it. Tend to your soul with the same care you give your body. Treat it as something sacred, because it is.

After all, your soul is your ticket to heaven. And since you only get one, it is paramount to nurture it wisely.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does obsessing over appearance set girls up for disappointment?
2. When you see a girl who's prettier than you, do you automatically dislike her? Could you be friends with her, or would that trigger too much insecurity?
3. What does your inner critic tell you? How can you replace his lies with God's truth?
4. Is physical perfection your goal? If so, how does the quest affect your self-esteem and self-worth?

Chapter 10

Self-Talk

5. What does a beautiful soul look like? Who in your life possesses an inner beauty that makes them radiant?

Truth #1: The source
lives inside you. Look
God over the megaphone.

I couldn't find my cell phone. I'd called it twice from my parents' beach home. I tried again. Hard I listened, I couldn't hear anything. Frustrated and fed up, I think. *If I were a cell phone, I would throw it away like I've done*. I wasn't there. I'd exhausted all my tries. Then suddenly it hit me.