



# True Beauty

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You may have heard it said that one of the differences between a man and woman is that when a man looks at himself in the mirror, he admires the one physical feature about himself he considers attractive, while a woman only sees the features she considers unattractive.

I can't verify this is true of men, but it certainly seems true of women. Whether real or imagined, our eyes hone in on our "imperfections." We see the blemish. We compare ourselves to the world's current ideal of beauty and always come up short.

Why are women so obsessed with physical beauty? Why do women go to such extremes to be beautiful as culturally defined? Why aren't we pleased with "normal"?

The answer is simple and sobering: Our hearts are full of evil desires and sinful lusts. And to differing degrees, our hearts have believed the lie that physical beauty will bring us satisfaction and recognition. You know the false promises: *If you're beautiful, you will be happy and successful. You will be popular among the women, and you will be desirable to the men. You will know lasting intimacy and true love. You will be confident and secure. You will be important and significant.*

These are all things our sinful hearts crave. We lust for success, recognition, significance, importance, and approval. We become obsessed with making ourselves physically beautiful in an attempt to satisfy our sinful cravings. Yet the message is a lie. Physical beauty doesn't ensure happiness, fulfillment, or success.

## God's Definition of Beauty

We are exhorted in Romans 12:2 not to allow the world around us to squeeze us into its mold. We need to ask ourselves if we have been captivated by our culture's definition of beauty or God's. Do our thoughts and actions regarding our appearance reflect a cultural standard or a biblical standard?

God's definition of beauty stands in stark contrast to the way our culture defines beauty. Our culture defines beauty by how we look on the outside. God defines beauty by what we are like on the inside.

Our culture puts forth a standard of beauty that is unattainable by most. God puts forth a standard of beauty to which we can all attain if we just respond to His work of grace in our lives.

Our culture encourages women to cultivate a beauty that is skin-deep. God tells us to pursue an inner beauty of great worth.

Our culture encourages women to cultivate a beauty that will only last for a brief time. God encourages women to cultivate a beauty that will never fade and that will only grow more attractive with the passing of time.

Our culture calls us to cultivate a beauty that impresses others. God summons us to cultivate a beauty that is first and foremost for His eyes.

Do you see the difference? The beauty our culture esteems may turn some heads, but the beauty God calls us to cultivate will make a lasting impact. A woman who cultivates inner beauty, who fears God and lives to serve others, makes a difference in people's lives. This inner, godly beauty makes an indelible mark on the lives of others and glorifies God.

## Heart Check

Which beauty are you seeking to cultivate? Are you intentionally cultivating inner beauty, or do you give more attention to the outward appearance? The way you think about and attend to your personal appearance is really a mirror of your heart. By reflecting either godly motivations or selfish motivations, you reveal whether your priority is to cultivate inner beauty or outer beauty.

Here's a "heart check" test for the purpose of self-examination—questions to help you discern your thoughts, motives, and goals with regard to the issue of beauty.

- Do I spend more time daily caring for my personal appearance than I do in Bible study, prayer, and worship?
- Do I spend excessive money on clothes, hair, and makeup, or is it an amount that is God-honoring?
- Do I want to lose weight to "feel better about myself," or do I desire to be self-disciplined for the glory of God?
- Am I on a quest for thinness to impress others, or do I seek to cultivate eating habits that honor God?
- Do I exercise to try to create or maintain a "good figure," or do I exercise to strengthen my body for God's service?

- Is there anything about my appearance that I wish I could change, or am I fully grateful to God for the way He created me?
- Am I jealous of the appearance of others, or am I truly glad when I observe other women who are more physically attractive than I?
- Do I covet the wardrobe of others, or do I genuinely rejoice when other women are able to afford and purchase new clothing?
- When I attend an event or activity, do I sinfully compare myself with others, or do I go asking God to show me whom to love and how to do it?
- Do I ever dress immodestly or with the intent of drawing attention to myself, or do I always dress in a manner that pleases God?

Asking these questions on a consistent basis can help us weed out worldly values and cultivate a heart for God's priorities. By God's grace we can put to death the evil desires in our hearts that crave attention from others and that lead us to compare ourselves with others.

## His Design, His Claim

In the pursuit of true beauty, we each need to acknowledge God's providence and receive with gratefulness the body and appearance He has given to us.

A loving God has determined what we each look like. He decided our body shape, how tall we would be, the color of our eyes, and all the unique features that make up our body type and appearance—right down to our fingers! We can either spend our lives pining about the results of God's determination or receive with gratefulness His design, knowing that He does all things for His glory.

David said, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14). When was the last time you worshiped God for the way He created your body?

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