



## *introduction*

# Transformed in His Image

**A** quick internet search for “women + beauty” results in nearly **2 billion** entries! Magazine covers, billboards, shopping malls, and television ads also shout the message that physical beauty is the most important thing in life. And we believe it! The temptation to try the latest product that promises to lift, shape, slim, or otherwise fix us is always there.

Men are not exempt. They too buy into the myth that physical appearance is the most important measurement of a person, which means buying the latest clothes, trying the newest exercise programs, having just the right style. This enticing lie poisons not only their own self-perceptions but also their view of women.

Author Regina Franklin urges us to see ourselves through God's eyes and to learn that He longs to restore our fragile self-images, not through miracle creams, gym memberships, tummy tucks, or the latest designer fashions but through God's unconditional love for us. She urges us toward a new, better definition of true beauty: "I must *choose* to see myself as God sees me. I must *choose* to set aside the world's definition of beauty. Rather than making sure that my hair is in the right place, I ensure that my heart is in the right place. Rather than worrying that my jewelry doesn't match my outfit, I contemplate whether my attitude matches what I profess to believe. Rather than wondering if others see me as physically beautiful, I focus on whether others see Christ's spiritual beauty in me. But the process is not without struggle."

Regina's honest musings hold wisdom for all of us, male or female, young or old. I hope you will be encouraged as you join her in the journey toward understanding and appreciating the priceless treasure God has placed within each of us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol Holquist". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

CAROL HOLQUIST, PUBLISHER  
DISCOVERY HOUSE PUBLISHERS

# *contents*

## *one*

**Voices Without** ..... 5

## *two*

**Voices Within** ..... 11

## *three*

**A New Perspective** ..... 25

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(p.25) John Benetti

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*one*

## **Voices Without**

**T**o say that I miss my father deeply is to say that ocean water tastes slightly of salt. He died of cancer shortly before he would have celebrated his fifty-first birthday. He knew how to create something out of nothing. From swimming in the “crick” behind his house to completing his PhD in music theory and composition, my father took the simplest of experiences and made them great.

The youngest son of a backwoods, small-town southern preacher, my dad knew even as a young man that his dreams lay outside the boundaries of Vanceboro, North Carolina. So he did what so many young men do when they long to see the world—he joined the Armed Forces.

Running from God when he left home, he soon

discovered that God could find him even outside of Vanceboro. He discovered a greater desire and followed God's call into the ministry. He spent the next 31 years weaving the tapestry of his life from the fibers of his greatest loves—God, family, music, and learning.

Nothing but God can fill the void created by my father's death. But when I start to dwell on the loss of his presence, God reminds me to consider the gift of his life. He taught me the wonder of God and the wonder of learning, and he taught me that the two go hand in hand—to love God is to desire to know Him more.

However, despite my father's many accomplishments, he was always frustrated with his physical appearance, especially his weight. He saw society's physical image of a successful man, and he allowed himself to be dwarfed by this standard. Thus, he lost sight of what made him truly valuable. While my father was a talented musician, a gifted teacher, and a trustworthy man, he struggled to comprehend his inherent value.

Though words were seldom spoken, my father heard "voices without" telling him that he didn't look the part of a minister. Seeing senior pastors validate men who appeared to be successful, and watching hiring committees choose staff based on physical appearance rather than on qualifications, my father heard the silent message loud and clear. A man's image indicates his value behind the pulpit.



Even though my father's genuineness drew people to him, he always shortchanged himself by thinking people wanted him to be someone

***Negative ideas about himself permeated my father's speech, and I learned that same derogatory self-evaluation.***

different. One of his few inconsistencies was that he rarely modeled what he told me regarding the relationship between achievement and self-esteem. The only thing he expected of me was that I do my best. God would perform great works despite my weaknesses. However, I did not see this philosophy reflected in my father's perception of himself.

Negative ideas about himself permeated my father's speech, and I learned that same derogatory self-evaluation. After all, how could I find my appearance and achievements acceptable when the man whom I admired most found himself unacceptable?

With the word *diet* a part of my dad's everyday vocabulary, I grew up thinking yogurt, grapefruit, and Tab



*Philippians 2:5-11 gives us a clear example of self-worth that is healthy and humble. Jesus Christ did not think any more or any less of himself than appropriate. Proper self-esteem flows from having the mind of Christ.*

were staples in any successful weight-loss program. And for every new diet program, there was a new exercise regimen to match. The only thing that lasted longer than my dad's diet and exercise programs was his desire to lose weight.

Subsequently, I observed a troublesome element of my parents' relationship: my father expected my mother to be guardian of the refrigerator and thus the guardian of his dieting destiny. I, too, found myself looking for someone to carry the burden of my weight-loss, someone who not only would help me lose weight but someone I could blame when I felt fat.



One day as my parents sat talking at the kitchen table, I marched resolutely into the room and announced that I wanted them to monitor how many potato chips I was eating. I was not overweight, nor were my eating habits excessive. I was feeling ugly and unlovable, and I wanted someone to help me change the outside of myself so I could love the inside.

Wisely, my parents refused. I promptly burst into tears and told them that if they wouldn't help me, maybe I'd become bulimic or anorexic. Like my father, I thought that controlling what I ate would produce the body I wanted and the feeling of contentment that I longed for. And like my father, I was missing the point.

Although my father passed away before I began to understand the truth regarding self-image, he would

have been deeply grieved to know how intensely his self-perceptions affected me. He thought his behavior affected only himself. But speech that tears down one person's temple creates an atmosphere, and all who enter feel its influence.

What voices do you hear from without? Childhood peers whose taunts

***Our self-esteem is rooted in our spirit. Our longings to know who we are in Christ cannot be answered by attempts to remake our physical beings.***

ring in your ears long after you've grown?  
A parent whom you could never please?  
A spouse who rarely tells you that you're attractive and whose silence echoes off the walls of your heart?

Hearing the voices, we search for ways to silence them. The diet that works, the perfect exercise program, a makeover. Still, the voices linger, sometimes so loudly that we can barely hear the truth about ourselves.

Because our self-esteem is rooted in our spirit, our longings to know who we are in Christ cannot be answered by attempts to remake our physical beings.



*Trying to find meaning in the approval of others leads to disappointment as those expectations go unmet.*

Such a pursuit never silences the voices and leaves our spiritual longing unanswered. Eventually, the voices from without are joined by the voices from within.



two

## Voices Within

**C**hoose any moment of any day and you can hear the cacophony of the world ringing in your ears. It's a wonder we can hear ourselves think, much less hear the voice of God.

Then come the voices with which we contend even in moments of solitude. These are the voices within. Everyone hears them, but most feel helpless to silence them. Recognizing the power of the voices within, Nicole Johnson, author of *A Fresh Brewed Life*, wrote, "These voices keep our souls chained in the basement. They make us fearful to try anything new, anxious about what others think of us, and they keep us on the treadmill of performance."

We have listened to these messages and obeyed them for so long that they have taken root in our hearts

and become the words by which we live. Words of inadequacy, failure, ugliness. They are the lies that we know better than truth.

Ironically, when we feel the nagging desire to know beauty beyond this world, we hurriedly stifle these longings so as not to create any greater tension within us. What results is the masking of our true desires with a superficial sense of belonging.

For many years, I believed I was alone in my struggle to love myself and see myself as beautiful. I had shared many secrets with friends, but not the overwhelming sense of inadequacy I felt. We talked about our love for God and our families, but we didn't share our fear that we could not learn to love ourselves.



Over the years, I have listened more closely to the voices of others, and I have learned that I do not struggle alone.

Few people knew the deep dissatisfaction I felt toward myself when I was growing up. I always appeared to be a self-assured young woman. I had learned to bury my feelings of dislike under a mound of activities and accomplishments. I couldn't comprehend my inherent value, so I created value in a long list of club activities and academic achievements. When the voices told me I'd never be beautiful, I answered their litany of accusations with my own litany of accomplishments. Because I could not separate what I did from who I was, to fail at what I did was to fail at who I was.

After graduating from high school, I left home to

enter college. Despite my desire to leave behind the familiar but unfriendly voices, they traveled with me.

While in high school, I had received feedback on each homework assignment, quiz, test, and paper. In college, however, homework assignments involved large quantities of reading. Quizzes were almost nonexistent; tests and papers were assigned over the course of a whole semester and sometimes were

***We have listened to and obeyed these messages for so long that they have taken root in our hearts and become the words by which we live.***

not returned. I struggled to find my bearings. I knew that my grades had been important to me, but not until I no longer had them to use as a measurement did I realize how much they meant. I had made my grades and accomplishments the sum of who I was. Instead of paying attention to this truth, I tried even harder to silence it.

Activities became more important than ever. I joined clubs and vied for leadership positions on campus. But the voices were always with me. To control

and suppress their tirade, I spent more time focusing on what I ate and when I exercised. While these pursuits were not wrong, my motivation was. Unhappy with who I was, I attempted to find my worth in things other than God. My actions were motivated by the desire to please others rather than God.

The harder we try to silence the voices of society by finding meaning in transitory things, the louder the voices within us cry out that we have no value. I knew I was supposed to find my value in God, and even in the midst of my internal struggles I knew God to be faithful. However, I was always left to wrestle with the abiding tension between my desire to know more of God and my desire for the approval of others.

More important, I had difficulty transferring what *God* thought about me to what *I* thought about me. I clung to the words God spoke to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah because I knew they held truth for me too: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (29:11-13).

I wanted God's will for my life; I just didn't understand that God's plan for me involved accepting myself as He had made me and giving up my search for peace outside myself. When I achieved confidence in my appearance, the assurance of success, and the approval of others, I thought that then I would know God's will for my life.

When the activities left me still longing, I convinced myself that when I found my soul mate—the one with whom God would have me spend my future—I would find the longed-for peace and self-love. Having someone love and pursue me would prove to me that I had value. Surely then I would understand the depth of God's thoughts and feelings about me.

Every young girl longs for the day when she will find her knight in shining armor. Having regularly engaged in reading the timeless romance of *Anne of Green Gables*, I needed no encouragement to hope for the man who would be my Gilbert. Schoolgirl romanticism has its place in stirring our dreams and our hopes for the future, but taken to an extreme, it is deceptive. From the schoolgirl point of view, the story ends as the woman and her knight marry and live happily ever after. But sometimes the perils of struggle follow the lovers as they ride off into the sunset. Sometimes the knight cannot rescue the maiden.

When I met Scott, the man who would one day be my husband, I found a man whom I loved and whose opinion I truly valued. But the deep places of my heart had holes that Scott could not fill. My



*Often we mistake  
what we do for  
who we are.  
Function and  
identity are two  
distinct ideas.*

insecurities were not healed when Scott asked me to marry him, nor when we walked down the aisle and said our vows.

Marriage does not dispel personal misgivings. If anything, it magnifies unresolved insecurities. Struggles inevitably come, and their arrival reveals the condition of our hearts. We can no longer hide behind doors marked "private." Marriage, as it should, makes us vulnerable, even in areas we pretend do not exist. The voices that I had effectively stifled while dating cried out even before we came home from the honeymoon.

I had eagerly anticipated the day Scott and I would know each other intimately, but I didn't anticipate the nuances of miscommunication that sex can bring into a relationship. The idea that physical intercourse equals love is a difficult myth to dispel even when we know it is false.



I began using the physical aspects of our relationship to judge my husband's valuation of me. When he was too tired or too stressed for physical intimacy, I missed the opportunity to broaden my understanding of love. Instead, I listened to voices telling me that if I were thinner, he would want me regardless of whatever else he was feeling.

Even the way he spent his time became a measure of my self-worth. If I felt we weren't spending enough time together, I concluded I was not pretty enough. Because my insecurities blocked the true nature of the conflict, working toward a solution was impossible. My

self-esteem issues rather than my Creator were controlling my relationship with my husband.

The irony of these voices is that my husband's voice never stopped telling me that I was beautiful or that he loved me. I simply wasn't hearing him. More accurately, I was choosing not to believe him. My marriage, while one of God's greatest gifts to me, didn't silence the voices because my insecurities went deeper than my relationship with my

***Marriage does not dispel personal misgivings. If anything, it magnifies unresolved insecurities.***

husband. They went to the core of who I was—to my relationship with Christ.

I knew with my head, but not with my heart, that my beauty and worth are found in Christ. Because I valued the beauty of this world, I believed that my value could be found there. And because my values were based on the world's standards, I expected others to determine my worth in the same manner.

When I joined a Christian-based weight-loss program, I thought I had

found the answer. I would silence the voices by finding the body I'd always wanted—and I would be pursuing God in the process. My motive, though, was wrong. I was joining the program not to become healthy but to be thin. I wasn't pursuing God so He could create a new heart in me; I was turning my weight loss over to God so He would create a new outward person for me to live in.

I had found a way to stifle the voices, but they still were not silent. When I looked in the mirror and heard *I'm so fat*, I followed the program more vigorously and fought the voices with my fat-gram tally sheet. When I looked in the mirror and heard *No one sees me as beautiful*, I replayed all the compliments I had heard from others on my weight loss. When I looked in the mirror and heard *I'll never have it together like other women*, I looked at the smaller pant-size that now fit.



But I wasn't really defeating the voices. I was feeding them. As long as I was losing weight, I could accept myself. My value still came down to my external appearance. Only now I had made losing weight a spiritual discipline. I even began to equate being thin with being spiritual.

Thirteen weeks into the program, I had lost 22 pounds. I not only felt in control of my weight, I felt in control of my spirituality. Pursuing God had become much more formulaic. Eating fried chicken was sinful while eating raw vegetables was godly. Likewise, the more I exercised, the more spiritual I felt. I believed that

because I had been unhappy with myself, God had been unhappy with me. Now that I was thin, I could begin to please God. But my contentment hung by a tenuous thread.

I had asked God to change the way I looked, to help me diet, to help me exercise every day, to help me find the right clothes, to make me anyone but me. But in all my asking for solutions to my insecurities, I had never asked Him

***I believed that because I was unhappy with myself, God had been unhappy with me.***

to change my heart. Until one Sunday afternoon. Arriving home from church, I walked to the bedroom and curled up on the bed, dress clothes and all. I had reached the bottom. Feeling broken and emotionally spent, I began to cry. I begged God to change me. Saying the words aloud for the first time, I told God I hated my body and I hated myself. But I did not want to continue hating myself, and I did not want to continue chasing the shadowy image of beauty the world had offered me. On that day, I stopped

asking God to make me thin and beautiful. Instead, I asked God to teach me to understand the beauty He sees in me. Those simple words began a journey—a journey to understand priceless beauty from the heart of One who paid the price with His life.

My struggle with the voices within has taught me that I must find my value in the One who gives me value. Surrounding myself with achievements and accomplishments cannot convince me of my value, seeking love from others cannot convince me of my value, and changing the way I look cannot convince me of my value.



The voices within thrive upon weakness. But a deeper message is waiting to be heard: *We were made for something more.* God is to be our strength, and His strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 CORINTHIANS 12:9).

In our battle against the voices within and without, we must recognize four important truths.

**First,** we must allow the words that we hear from others to be filtered through Scripture, which indicates the thoughts on which we are to dwell:

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).*

Constructive criticism has its place, but accusations of failure and inadequacy do not. When we hear what others say about us and about themselves, we must

determine whether our rehearsal of those comments will strengthen or undermine our understanding of who we are in Christ.

***Constructive criticism has its place, but accusations of failure and inadequacy do not.***

**Second**, we must change the way we speak about ourselves. When we deride ourselves, we curse God's creation. We essentially tell God, "I know You called it good, but I don't believe it's good enough." How can we claim to praise and worship God and, with the same mouth, curse His creation? Scripture says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer" (PSALM 19:14) and Jesus taught, "out of the abundance of the heart [the] mouth speaks" (LUKE 6:45). Words of denigration reveal a heart problem. Our heart is listening to the life-taker and not the Life-Giver.

**Third**, we must learn to identify the words spoken by the one who seeks to destroy our souls. Satan is a liar. We know



*"But he said to me,  
'My grace is  
sufficient for you,  
for my power is  
made perfect  
in weakness.'  
Therefore I will  
boast all the more  
gladly about my  
weaknesses, so  
that Christ's power  
may rest on me"  
(2 COR. 12:9 NIV).*

that he comes only "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (JOHN 10:10). Deception is at the core of his being, and thus everything he speaks is void of truth. We can identify his words when we hear them—he speaks words of rejection, hatred, failure, and discontent.

"I'll never measure up."

"I can never be beautiful."

"I am the sum of all my failures."

"If I were thinner, I'd be happier."

"I'm not good at anything."

"If I had new clothes, I'd be satisfied with the way I look."

"I'm so fat."

All lies. Words of death, not life. If he can convince us that we're worthless, he can immobilize us and keep us from fulfilling God's plan for our lives. Out of fear of rejection, we won't reach out to others. We'll wallow in self-hatred. Out of fear of failure, we won't follow our dreams. We'll drown in discontent.

The clamor of voices rings in our heads while we bravely paste smiles on our faces.

We quietly tell ourselves that we must live with the voices and pretend to have the peace and self-assurance that we long for but which slip through our fingers with every self-deprecating word. And then the voices become more vicious.

"If God really cared, He wouldn't have made you look this way."

"If you can't believe God loves you just the way you are, His love must not be true."



"If you were really spiritual, you wouldn't struggle to love yourself."

Lies. All lies. When we call them what they are, they lose their power and the truth becomes clearer. Beauty does exist, and God waits for us like a patient lover.

**Finally**, we must hear what God has to say about us.

*Before the beginning of time, I knew you. I knew what color your eyes would be, and I could hear the sound of your laughter. Like a proud father who carries a picture of his daughter, I carried the image of you in My eyes, for you were created in My image. Before the beginning of time, I chose you. I spoke your*



*Far too often we fail to focus on the lavish love God has extended to us. It is a love that allows us to be called His children (1 JOHN 3:1).*

***If he [Satan] can convince us that we're worthless, he can immobilize us and keep us from fulfilling God's plan for our lives.***

*name into the heavens, and I smiled as its melody resounded off the walls of My heart. You are Mine. My love for you extends farther than the stars in the sky and deeper than any ocean. You are My pearl of great price, the one for whom I gave everything. I cradle you in the palm of My hand. I love you even in the face of your failure. Nothing you say or do can cause Me to stop loving you. I am relentless in My*

*pursuit of you. Run from Me—I will love you. Spurn Me—I will love you. Reject yourself—I will love you. You see, My love for you was slain before the foundations of the world and I have never regretted the sacrifice I made for you at Calvary. When I see every part of who you are, I marvel at the work of My hands, for I whispered words of longing and desire and you came into existence. You are beautiful, and I take pleasure in you—heart, mind, and body. You are My desire. When you turn your head in shame and despise what I have made, still I reach for you with gentle passion. You are My beloved and I am yours (AUTHOR'S ADAPTATION FROM 1 JOHN 3:2; ISALAH 43:1; MATTHEW 13:46; EPHESIANS 1:4; REVELATION 13:8; PSALM 149:4; SONG OF SOLOMON 7:10; 6:3).*

God longs for us to know His beauty, but we must choose how to respond to the voices we hear.

The voices from without and within skew reality. Hearing God's voice above the destructive invective is an ongoing struggle. We may never silence the voices, but we can choose whether or not the voices define who we are. God stands waiting to lead us on a journey to know true beauty, a journey that begins by listening carefully to His heart and gazing into the mirror of His Word.



*three*

## A New Perspective

**O**ne summer, my husband and I took a group of teenagers to inner-city Chicago for a missions trip. As our host drove us to our downtown housing, we could see in the distance two very large buildings, one obviously taller than the other. We asked him if the taller building was the Sears Tower. To our surprise, he said the building we had mistaken to be the Sears Tower was in fact the John Hancock Building. A little arrogant and very ignorant, I determined that our host either didn't get out much or was unaware that the Sears Tower was the tallest building in Chicago. The tower he was identifying as the John Hancock Building was obviously much larger than the building he claimed was the Sears Tower.

As we continued around the city, however, our perspective changed, and our view eventually matched

what our host had asserted. The taller became the shorter, and the shorter became the tallest of all—and the difference was visually significant.

That day I learned that perspective depends on where I stand.

Earlier that same summer, my husband and I had traveled to New Jersey to visit some college friends. I had not seen any of them in at least 4 years. In that time I had gained 30 pounds, and I found myself wrestling with issues that I thought I had put to rest. While I was visiting one friend in particular, God led me down a new path in understanding His beauty.



We had become friends during my sophomore year in college, and we shared a kindred spirit. Now both married and pursuing our respective callings, we greeted one another with joy—and surprise. Like me, she had gained some weight over the years. No longer did I feel the pressure to look the same as I had as a college sophomore, and no longer did I worry what she would think of the changes in my body.

While my friend and I paged through a picture album from our college days, God taught me an important lesson in perspective. Flipping through the memories, she casually commented, "Do you know what I think of when I see these pictures? I think of how much skinnier I was back then." I sat quietly for a moment, then responded, "I remember how fat I *thought* I was when these pictures were taken."

Just as I had to have the proper perspective to see which building was the tallest in downtown Chicago, so too I

need the proper perspective to see which beauty is true—the world's or God's.

Proper perspective occurs when we see as God sees. I must find my identity in the

***My identity is the core of who I am—  
a constant by which I am defined,  
regardless of circumstances.***

One who sees as God sees. To know true beauty, I must identify with Christ. My identity is the core of who I am—a constant by which I am defined, regardless of circumstances. Identity in Christ, though, is not a passive understanding of our individual characteristics. Identity in Christ is a powerful, living force. My identity defines and shapes my life: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (GALATIANS 2:20). My understanding of physical beauty, along with the desires of my flesh, has been crucified with Christ. Thus the beauty that now resides in me is that of the Spirit, not of the flesh.

Furthermore, my body, along with

my beauty, is now a symbol of my relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul set forth this idea when he wrote: "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, *that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again* (2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-15, ITALICS ADDED).

My life is no longer about me. Trying to create my own beauty in the world's image is to separate my beauty from my identity in Christ. Holding to the world's image of beauty is refusing to crucify my desires and living willfully in the flesh.

Two questions then arise: How do I live out my identity in Christ, and how do I change my perspective from worldly beauty to spiritual beauty? After all, I am both flesh and spirit. I cannot simply say that how I look doesn't matter.

With one simple statement, Jesus summed up how we are to find our identity and our beauty in Him. When asked which commandment was the greatest, Jesus responded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment" (MATTHEW 22:37-38). When I pursue God with all I am, what I want will change. Worldly desire will die, and my new desire will be to live in Him and for Him. Finding my identity in Christ, I allow all that I am—spirit, mind, and body—to be defined by God.

God has given us the Holy Spirit to help us understand our new identity:



“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (ROMANS 8:14-16).

When we allow the Holy Spirit to direct us, we avoid becoming enslaved to the world’s standard of beauty and instead are set free to find our true beauty in Christ. When the Holy Spirit “bears witness . . . that we are children of God,” we begin to see ourselves and our beauty as God sees us. My understanding of beauty will then have proper perspective

***Allow the Holy Spirit to direct us, and we avoid becoming enslaved to the world’s standard . . . We are set free to find our true beauty in Christ.***

because I will see myself not as the world sees me but as God sees me—in Christ.

To understand the role of the Holy Spirit in transforming our thinking about beauty, we must realize that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth who will give us the discernment to know the truth of God’s beauty. What we hear will reveal

the heart of God and thus be in accord with the Word of God. However, the Holy Spirit cannot be heard if we are unwilling to listen to and live by God's commandments. Nor can the Spirit reveal the truth of God's beauty if we insist on viewing ourselves from a worldly perspective. The Holy Spirit fulfills His role as our Counselor as we seek to see ourselves and others from a godly perspective of beauty.

This transformation is a process not an event. It requires daily renewal. To believers in the first-century church of Ephesus, Paul wrote, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and . . . put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (EPHESIANS 4:23-24). Being renewed in our minds requires action—we are to "put on the new man."

In other words, I must *choose* to see myself as God sees me. I must *choose* to consider all things in my life in light of their spiritual importance. I must *choose* to set aside the world's definition of beauty. Rather than evaluating everything I eat in terms of what will make me fat or thin, I work to make choices for my body in terms of what will bring strength and health to my temple that I might accomplish the tasks God has for me to do. Rather than making sure that my hair is in the right place, I ensure that my heart is in the right place. I focus on whether others see Christ's spiritual beauty in me.

If my identity is in Christ, who I am on the inside will be visible in my actions. A life lived in the Spirit is marked by certain behaviors—the fruit of my life—not by my appearance: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,

peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (GALATIANS 5:22-23).

Growing spiritual fruit requires a transformation of the mind because what I think and believe determine how I act. Accordingly, the more I study the Word *and put it into action*, the more I am transformed into the image of Christ. The more I pursue Christ, the more I see life in proper perspective.

A paradox of Scripture is that the more we bind ourselves to Christ, the more freedom we enjoy. Believing this paradox requires a shift in perspective. Enacting this paradox requires a shift in priorities. Cultivating the fruit of the Spirit requires work. Often we convince ourselves that changing physically is easier than developing spiritually. After all, a new hairstyle doesn't require that I find the weak areas of my character and allow God to push me to change. But a new hairstyle doesn't free me from the unrealistic expectations of worldly beauty. Neither does losing 10 or 15 pounds.

In contrast, a new perspective and new priorities make me free indeed. After listing the spiritual fruit that I am to cultivate, Paul added, "Against such there is no



*When we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, that offering is holy and pleasing to Him. With the proper heart motivation, it is a spiritual act of worship.*  
(CF. ROM. 12:1).

law." Tending to the growth of spiritual fruit takes me from slavery to freedom.

To find this freedom, I must shift my perspective from the mirror of the world to the mirror of the Word. Trying to find beauty in the mirror of this world will leave me broken and lost. But losing myself in the mirror of the Word will reveal the greatest beauty ever known.

When the Holy Spirit transforms our perspective regarding our beauty, our relationships with others change:

*And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another (GALATIANS 5:24-26).*

Rather than comparing ourselves to others and becoming jealous, we see them through God's eyes and become grateful for their unique gifts and talents.

When I see myself and others through God's eyes, my life, including my body, becomes an instrument of ministry that fulfills the purpose for which it was created—to bring glory and honor to an awesome God.

Seeing beauty requires a godly perspective. If I rely on my own understanding, I will never have the proper perspective. But when I trust the One on whom the whole earth rests, "the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 CORINTHIANS 3:16-18). The closer I move toward Him, the more accurate my perspective becomes.



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