

Mirror Mirror...
Am I Beautiful?



Looking Deeper to Find Your True Beauty
by Shelley Hitz and Heather Hart

CONTENTS

Part One: The Pretty Problem

- Chapter 1: Am I Beautiful?
- Chapter 2: Authentic Beauty
- Chapter 3: Insecurity
- Chapter 4: Barbie Body Image
- Chapter 5: Do You Like Me?
- Chapter 6: Self-Esteem
- Chapter 7: Body Image Lies
- Chapter 8: My Design
- Chapter 9: Daddy's Little Girl
- Chapter 10: God's Word

Part Two: Faith and Fashion

- Chapter 11: Look At Me
- Chapter 12: God's Fashion Tip
- Chapter 13: Fashion Tips
- Chapter 14: Beach Babes

Part Three: Sex and Dating

- Chapter 15: Flirting
- Chapter 16: The Dating Scene
- Chapter 17: Girls vs. Guys
- Chapter 18: How Far is Too Far?
- Chapter 19: Sex and Depression
- Chapter 20: Overcoming Abuse
- Chapter 21: Homosexuality

Part Four: Finding Your True Beauty

- Chapter 22: Connect with God
- Chapter 23: U-Turn
- Chapter 24: Hope for the Hurting
- Chapter 25: Forgiveness...
- Chapter 26: You Are Beautiful

Appendix ***Bible Study Guide***

Preface to the Second Edition

I first read *Mirror Mirror... Am I Beautiful?* in 2009, and I loved it. It is a resource I wish I would have had when I was a teen girl. As my own daughters approach their teen years, I am more aware than ever how much has changed since then. In the past decade alone, major changes have taken place with the rise of social media and smart phones, and there has been a drastic shift in society norms.

Thus, when Shelley asked me to come on as the co-author of the second edition of this book, I was both honored and humbled. This book has reached thousands of girls, positively impacting lives for Christ. My hope is that with the updates to the second edition it will continue to be relevant and reach countless more.

While much of the original content is timeless, we have added a chapter on social media, and made a few other changes to make it relevant, modern, and easy to follow. I have also added much of my own story throughout to give an added perspective. However, the message and purpose remains the same. We hope it will help each reader find their true beauty in Christ.

Throughout the book, you will find sections titled “Share Your Thoughts” these are questions that you can answer on our website, or in your own private journal. Either way, we hope you will take the time to honestly reflect on each question. You can even visit our website to see what other girls are saying.

We pray that the words in this book will reach off the page and into your heart, helping you find your true beauty in Christ.

Heather Hart

Part One

The Pretty Problem



Am I Beautiful?

The Modern Beauty Epidemic

According to Dr. Ann Kearney-Cooke, Ph.D., a psychologist and self-esteem expert, “Low self-esteem among girls and young women has reached a crisis level.”⁽¹⁾

Did you know

- ~ 24% of women would sacrifice three years of their lives to be thin.
- ~ Girls as young as five have expressed fears of getting fat.
- ~ 90% of high school junior and senior girls diet regularly even though only between 10-15% are considered overweight.

Do these statistics surprise you? Do you wonder why this is happening?

We believe one of the biggest influences on girls today regarding beauty is the media.

As children, we are encouraged that we can be whatever we want; do whatever we want. If we don't like something about ourselves, we have the power to change it. The sky is the limit, and we should reach for the stars. In an article written for the Barna Group's website, Katie Harris wrote that while that message is empowering and beautiful, it has been morphed into a pressure cooker. She said, “What once was ‘You *can* have it all’ has now become ‘You *need to* have it all’”⁽²⁾ (emphasis ours).

That's the message we are faced with today. Yet, there really isn't a way to meet all of the ever-changing and conflicting views the world holds about beauty. And some of the women who you would think have achieved that level of perfectly beautiful have confessed that the closer you think you get to being beautiful by the world's standards, the worse off and more insecure you actually feel.

In the past several years, models like Kylie Bisutti, Jennifer Strickland, and Erin Heatherton have started leaving the modeling scene because they have realized that it's not all it's cracked up to be. It didn't affirm their beauty, but put them on even shakier ground. Yet these are the women we look at and idolize.

Movies, advertising, social media... they all bombard us with images of picture perfect women that we can never compete with, partly because they aren't real women by the time we see them. Even with as beautiful as they are to start with, they are air brushed and altered almost beyond recognition at times.

In 2006, Dove put out a commercial that showed the evolution of a model from start to finish. She comes out and sits down with no makeup or lighting, and the commercial then fast-forwards through the process of making her beautiful, complete with photo editing. The end shows the final product on a billboard, and if you hadn't watched the whole video, you would probably never guess it was the same girl.

With today's morphed and unattainable view of beauty, we can feel like we are on the losing end of a battle. That's the reason we decided to write this book, to help you recognize these influences and discover your true beauty. It's always been there; it just needs to be found and rescued.

Like Cinderella

Like so many people do, I (Shelley) love the story of Cinderella. I think her story continues to be told in many different cultures and generations because, in one way or another, we can all relate to her. We can relate to her darkness, her struggles, her oppressors, yet we also long to be rescued by our Prince Charming.

What is the one question all girls ask, even from a small age?

“Am I beautiful?”

I remember that my dream as a young girl was to be Miss America. At our slumber parties in my basement, my friends and I would actually hold our own Miss America contests; dressing up and coming down the steps to the familiar tune of “Here she comes, Miss America.”

Unfortunately, the lies from the media destroy that hope... the hope that we would be found beautiful.

That's where I (Heather) come in.

I was born with cancer and lost my right eye when I was really little. Some talented professionals have made me a very realistic looking prosthetic, but there is still a noticeable difference between my real eye and my fake eye. Because of this difference, I grew up knowing that I could never be beautiful—that I would never measure up. I was hopeless and discouraged.

Well, Girls, it's Time to Relight Our Hope and Find Our True Beauty!

There is an epidemic of unreality sweeping our country when it comes to beauty, body image, and self-esteem. Left untreated, it will only get worse. We need to uncover the lies we've been believing and replace them with the truth. John 8:32 says, *“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

I can tell you we are ready to break free, and we are so excited you have decided to join us.

Let's embark on this journey together.

Throughout the pages of this book, we will be your guides, but we will all have many stories to share along the way. We look forward to sharing ours and hearing yours. Ready?

— Share Your Thoughts —

Advertising and Body Image... Is There a Connection?

As a teen girl, do you think it is fair that the media portrays an unrealistic “perfect image” for how we should look? How do you think this impacts your self-esteem and body image?

Share your opinion and read what others have to say at
Share.TrueBeautyBook.com



Authentic Beauty

What is the Truth About Beauty?

Before we can really know what the truth about beauty is, we have to know what the truth is. So let's start by looking at the word "authentic." It's another word for truth or true. Genuine.

Authenticity, what is it?

Think of it this way: would you rather have a homemade Thanksgiving dinner or a frozen TV dinner? Would you rather have a genuine diamond ring or one with cubic zirconium? Those are no brainers, right? We want the real stuff. The authentic. But, so often in life, we give in and settle for less than the best. We choose the TV dinner and the cubic zirconium.

What does authenticity mean when it comes to us?

I (Shelley) believe being authentic is being able to accept myself and be who I really am. It's not about what others think of me or even what others want me to be. ***It's about being who I was created to be.*** That's where we begin to find the truth about beauty.

So, what was I created to be? What were you created to be?

This question has stumped me many times. I have found it really helpful just to start with what I know...

I know I was created by Jesus and for Jesus. *“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all things were created by him and for him**”* (Colossians 1:16). So, I was created to be God’s creation. I was created to be in a relationship with Jesus.

What else?

Romans 8:16-17 says, *“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that **we are God’s children**. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”* Therefore, I am created to be God’s daughter and, as the daughter of a King, a Princess. With this role come both privileges and responsibilities.

Ephesians 3:19 says, *“And to know this love that surpasses knowledge—**that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God**.”* The Amplified version says, *“flooded with God Himself.”* I am created to be filled with God’s love. That means there are no empty spots. My life is created to be full, not empty.

I am created for the display of God’s splendor (Isaiah 61:3). I am created to be a reflection of Him (Genesis 1:26). I am created to become more and more like my Father (Colossians 3:10). The real deal.

I am created to be beautiful.

Whoa... did that catch anyone else off guard? It did me. So many times I don’t feel beautiful. I feel the opposite. Homely and average, but not always beautiful. Created to be beautiful? That fact is sometimes hard to believe, but it’s true.

Dictionary.com defines beauty as, “the quality present in a thing or person that gives intense pleasure or deep satisfaction to the mind, whether arising from sensory manifestations (as shape, color, sound, etc.), a meaningful design or pattern, or something else (as a personality in which high spiritual qualities are manifest).”(3) It also adds that the British dictionary says beauty is, “the combination of all the qualities of a person or thing that delight the senses and please the mind.”

Zephaniah 3:17b says that God delights in us. He created us to reflect Him, and He is beautiful (Psalm 27:4); therefore, we were created with every quality needed to

be truly beautiful. Psalm 45:11 says, *“Let the king be enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord.”*

So, why am I afraid to embrace my true beauty?

Why do I settle for so much less than God’s best, striving for outward beauty and the world’s approval of how I look?

Because it’s the easy thing. Just like popping a TV dinner in the microwave is easier than cooking a full blown turkey dinner for Thanksgiving. It will not have the same rewards or results, but it’s easier.

Plus, our culture screams at us from every billboard, commercial, TV program, movie, magazine, and every corner of the Internet that our outer beauty is what matters. That to be valued by others, we have to look a certain way. Our culture is teaching us to settle for what the masses say beauty is instead of embracing the truth about beauty: our authentic and true beauty given to us by our Creator.

This is a picture I get of my true beauty: I see my beauty radiating from the inside out. That when I love God with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind (Matthew 22:37), my beauty will naturally spill over to all of my relationships and every area of my life. It’s as if God’s light and beauty are in my heart and being pumped into every cell of my body, my brain, my muscles, and my organs through my bloodstream.

As long as God’s Spirit is living inside of me, I will have that beauty radiating from the inside out. People will see the light in my eyes, they’ll be drawn to the joy in my smile, and they’ll want to find comfort in my friendship. Not because of what I look like on the outside, but because I am a reflection of Jesus.

Knowledge Is Power

I (Heather) have a saying that I love. I actually made it the wallpaper on my laptop (you can download it for free on our website). Here’s what it says:

I was created by Christ.
I was made in His image.
And I am flawless.

Let's be honest, do you believe that? Do you believe you are flawless? For most of my life, I would have thought you were crazy if you had told me I was, so I won't be surprised if you feel the same way.

I mentioned earlier that I was born with cancer. It was called retinoblastoma. Basically, tumors were growing on the retina of my right eye. The doctors informed us that the safest option was to remove the whole eye, so I have essentially lived my entire life with a prosthetic.

Thus, talking about true beauty being authentic would be the end of my hope if true beauty was external. By that standard, a fake eye equals fake beauty (or lack thereof). Even the best prosthetic is still fake, and you can tell something's not right. I know this. I live with it every day.

But because of Jesus, I have hope.

Several years ago, I was reading through Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon depending on your Bible), and I stumbled across a verse that stopped me in my tracks. Just a little background for you, Song of Songs is a love story between Solomon and his bride, but on a deeper level, it represents Christ's love for us because we are the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Ephesians 5:25; Revelation 22:17).

Here's what the verse said: "*You are altogether beautiful, my darling; **there is no flaw in you***" (4:7). No flaw. I felt flawed. I looked flawed. However, I knew the Bible was true to the very last word, so I had some soul searching to do.

Would I believe what God's Word said about me, or would I believe my bathroom mirror?

There are a couple of Bible verses that are always go-to verses when we talk about true beauty that we haven't mentioned yet:

1 Samuel 16:7 says, "*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.**'*"

And 1 Peter 3:3-4 says, "*Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes.*

*Rather, it should be that of your inner self, **the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit**, which is of great worth in God's sight."*

The heart is where our true beauty comes from. It is what God is looking at. I always stopped at the verse in Samuel and got stuck on the fact that people do look on outward appearances. I would think that God may have crafted us and designed us to be flawless in His eyes, but no one else would see it. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and all that, but, if you think about it, that's not really true either.

Think of it this way: Have you ever met someone who was drop dead gorgeous on the outside, but had an ugly personality? Maybe she was mean, rude, or self-centered, but whatever it was, while she might be pretty on the outside, it didn't make up for the ugliness on the inside. She wasn't truly beautiful; she was just easy on the eyes. Her heart, where true beauty comes from, wasn't beautiful at all.

Now, think of one of the nicest, kindest women you know. Chances are, she has an internal beauty that radiates out like Shelley mentioned earlier. She may not be a knockout by the world's standards (or maybe she is), but what really endears her to others is the beauty of her heart.

I was looking at some of the women at my church a few weeks back and realized that the ones I admire the most, the ones I think are beautiful, aren't perfect. They struggle with acne or scars it left behind. Not a single one is smaller than a size 6. In fact, most of them would be considered overweight.

They all have their own quirks, but they are all beautiful, not because of what's on the outside, but because of their hearts and the joy reflected in their smiles and the kindness in their actions. I realized that for years I have looked right past their outer appearances without a second thought. I just knew they were beautiful.

Realizing how I saw them led me to ask myself the following question: **If I can look past the outer appearance of others to see the true beauty of their hearts, why do I think others aren't doing the same thing when they look at me?**

The media may tell us that we have to portray a certain image to be beautiful, but through Christ I have found that there is more to being beautiful than what meets the eye. True beauty isn't just skin deep, and you don't have to be a size three with a flawless face to be beautiful. True beauty blossoms from the depths of our hearts.

What About You?

Have you been settling for this world's definition of beauty instead of discovering your true beauty? If so, we encourage you to discover the truth about beauty. Ask God to help you change your thoughts and desires about beauty, and He will. It may not be instant, but He will slowly begin to change you from the inside out!



Insecurity

Why Do We Struggle So Much?

There is an emptiness in many girls around this globe. It's fostered from the time we are small, and it stays with us long after we think we should have grown out of it. This emptiness is caused by insecurity.

In their book, *Girl Defined*, Kristen Clark and Bethany Baird diagnose the cause of our insecurity as our culture. They wrote, *"From the time we were little girls until now, our culture has been feeding us messages of what womanhood is all about... From the first moment a woman questions her identity, she begins wondering about her womanhood and whether she measure up."*(4)

We all struggle with insecurity on one level or another. We are ashamed of how we look, and we all long to measure up. In fact, we have a quiz on FindYourTrueBeauty.com where over 50% of girls admit that they are ashamed of how they look. Over fifty percent!

There is a Problem

Check out these body image statistics originally found in Dr. Deborah Newman's book, *Comfortable in Your Own Skin*.(5) These statistics show the depth of our problem:

~ Americans had 11 million cosmetic plastic surgery procedures in 2006.(6) And in 2015 that number was up to 15.9 million. The number of cosmetic plastic surgeries has risen over 115% since the year 2000.(7)

- ~ More than half of teenage girls are, or think they should be, on diets. They want to lose some or all of the 40 pounds that females naturally gain between ages 8 and 14. About 3% of these teens go too far, becoming anorexic or bulimic.(8)
- ~ The *Medical Journal of Psychiatry* conducted a general population study on men with eating disorders and found that 2% of men, compared to 4.8% of women, have (or have had) anorexia or bulimia.(9)
- ~ The average American woman is 5'4" tall and weighs 140 pounds, while the average American model is 5'11" tall and weighs 117 pounds. Most fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women.(10)
- ~ 80% of American women are dissatisfied with their appearance.(11)
- ~ Female athletes are six times more likely to develop eating disorders than other women.(12)
- ~ 80% of women say that the images of women on television and in movies, fashion magazines, and advertising makes them feel insecure.(13)
- ~ 42% of girls first through third grades want to be thinner.(14)
- ~ 81% of 10-year-olds are afraid of being fat.(15)
- ~ Without treatment, up to 20% of people with serious eating disorders die. With treatment, that number falls to 2 to 3%.(16)

These statistics don't even account for the rise in popularity and accessibility of social media. Research shows that an increased use of social media has a direct negative affect on self-esteem.(17) We are constantly bombarded with the perfections and opinions of others, and that is bound to make an impact.

Here is one more statistic that really sums up the totality of our self-esteem crisis:

- ~ Only 4% of women around the world currently consider themselves beautiful.(18)

4 percent!

The struggle is real, and we are not alone. In just a moment, we are going to introduce you to a young woman named Amber. Her story is one like countless

others we have heard from teen girls around the world. In fact, I (Heather) can relate to Amber's story so much that, if you change a few facts, it could have been me writing it.

I want to let Amber tell her story, but while you are reading it, think about the ways you can relate to what she is saying. Have you felt the same way, heard the same (or similar) comments, or been in a similar situation?

Wow, Am I Fat or What

By Amber

I have not always thought I was fat. My addiction with my size didn't start until my freshman year in high school. It seemed as though once I started verbally abusing myself I couldn't stop.

At first I would say, "Oh, if I only lose 10 pounds I would look so much better, and I would have so many more friends. And maybe (insert a guy's name) would even talk to me more." Then I looked in the mirror again and said, "Wow, my head is way too small for my body size. I just need to even it out, and then I'll look better."

This constant self-bashing continued and got worse than ever when I heard that some of my so-called friends had been talking about me. This cycle went on until the middle of the semester when I got a boyfriend. Our relationship made me feel better. It made me feel like I was pretty because he liked me, and I thought that someone saying I was pretty or beautiful made it true.

This feeling of self-worth was soon dashed when I found out that he wanted to break up with me. I came up with so many reasons why he would break up with me: my hair, my stomach, basically everything but my honey brown eyes were the problem.

I went through the rest of the term fine. I eventually got over the breakup and moved on, but I still held on to my self-hate with my body weight. All my real friends would tell me that I was not fat; I was "thick." And my best friend told me that the only real body problem I had was that I thought I was fat when I wasn't. She said, "You aren't skinny, but you are most definitely not fat."

This year I am a sophomore, and I go to a new school that I hate with a passion. Wherever I go, I always end up comparing myself to someone else and not being myself. I feel like I can't wear this or that because I'm not a size 6 or 7.

And I know that the reason that I may not have as many friends is not because I'm overweight, but because I don't love myself enough to let people into my shell. I am very surprised at myself that I am even writing this, so hope you read it.

I feel that I need to start loving myself no matter what I weigh because I know that God made me special, and I look the way I do for a reason. Even if I am overweight, I should not stress about it and deal with it by working out, eating better, and reading God's Word so that when someone says something mean about me it won't matter because I will know that I am beautiful and God loves me.

P.S I don't think I'm ugly, I just think I could lose some weight. :)

Can You Relate?

I (Heather) already told you that I can totally relate to Amber's story. When I was in high school, I had what's referred to as an "athletic build." I was a ballet dancer, so I had really strong, thick thighs. I was by no means fat, but I wasn't skinny either.

My mom always told me I was "healthy." My friends used the exact same comment as Amber's friends, "You aren't skinny, but you are not fat." The doctors always told me I was the perfect weight for someone my height. Yet, none of those reassurances made me feel any better. In fact, they made me feel worse, because they were confirming that I wasn't skinny. In my mind, you were skinny or fat; there really was no in between. I got so stuck on the "not skinny" label that I couldn't see anything else.

Shelley believes that part of the battle we fight with self-esteem is the secrecy. For example, mold grows best in darkness. So, just sharing what you are feeling helps to demolish some of the strength from the self-esteem struggle from your life. I saw this to be true in both Amber's story and in my own life.

When you start talking about something, you can't focus on just the bad; you also have to confess that you know the truth. Amber wrote, "I know that God made me

special, and I look the way I do for a reason.” There is a freedom to be found in those words. Knowing the truth about beauty and who we were created to be is the best way to counteract and overcome our insecurities.

Those insecurities can rear their ugly heads in countless different ways. Just like mold grows best in darkness, if we are too afraid to confront our insecurities, no matter what they are, they will just continue to eat at us. They will destroy our hope. But when we confess our insecurities, we can fight them with God’s truth.

Jesus said, “*I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness*” (John 12:46). The message we find in the Bible is first and foremost about how God saved the world through Christ, but it also tells us so much about who God is and who He created us to be. Only when we realize the magnitude of the whole message will we truly be free from our insecurities.

Feeling Empty Inside

I (Shelley) have also felt this emptiness before. For me, it tends to be a deep loneliness that threatens to engulf me. I often feel left out and rejected—like I am on the outside. Even though I have loving and meaningful relationships they aren’t enough. I still have that gaping hole inside. For you, it may feel different, but I bet it’s still there. Some of you may not even know it’s there. I lived with it for many years before I recognized it.

So, What’s the Problem?

Ultimately, the problem is that we are trying to find our self-esteem and worth apart from God. Colossians 1:16 says, “*All things were created by him and for him.*” That hole inside us is meant to be filled by God, so nothing else will be enough. We will always still feel “hungry” for more.

I tried to get my worth from many other things: my relationships (husband/boyfriend, family, and friends), my work (succeeding at what I do), my looks (clothes, makeup, hair, etc.), attention from guys, shopping, etc. We really can try to fill this emptiness and void with anything and everything. Many of those things can become addictions over time. I’ve had a couple of those too. And that is the enemy’s purpose. He has come to steal, kill, and destroy us (John 10:10). He wants to plant weeds in our lives to choke out the life giving, fruit bearing plants. He wants our insecurities and the lies we believe to suffocate us.

However, we believe there are other influences in our culture today that also contribute to our insecurities and this emptiness inside us. The influences that tell us it's all up to us. That it's our fault, and we are completely unworthy.

Heather and I both believe one of the biggest issues impacting us today is the pressure our culture places on us to look “picture perfect” in a million different ways. That pressure starts when we are little and gets increasingly worse as we reach our teen years. In the next chapter, we will look at one of the subtle influences that may or may not have impacted your life.



Barbie Body Image

How Toys Like Barbie Influence Our Body Image

How many girls have grown up playing with Barbie dolls? A lot. Statistics show that two Barbie's are sold every second somewhere in the world. In fact, the average American girl from ages 3 to 11 owns ten.(19)

Barbie's Body Type

Have you ever wondered what Barbie would look like if she were a real person? Since she's not, there are differing views on what she would look like. One source says Barbie would stand about 5'6", weigh less than 120 pounds, and have the measurements 39-18-33 (39 inches for her chest - 18 inches at her waist - 33 at her hips). In 2004, a study was done that found the average white American woman between 18 and 25 was 38-32-41.(20) That's a huge difference.

It is speculated that if Barbie were human, she would be so thin that she would not be able to have her monthly menstrual cycle because she would not have the body fat needed to do so.(21) Statistics say the Barbie's body type is likely to occur in one out of every 100,000 women.(22)

No matter how you look at it, Barbie's body is not average, and is not easily attainable.

Barbie's Impact

What impact does Barbie's plastic physique have on young girls that spend hours and hours playing with these dolls? Do they want to become like Barbie and look like her?

The more time we spend with anything, the more influence it has on us. If you spend weeks studying for a test, you'll probably do better than if you just spend a few minutes studying. Just as if we spend hours and hours watching a specific TV show, it will start to influence our lives.

Thus, if we spend hours and hours playing with Barbie dolls, they are bound to have an influence on us. The more time we spend with something, the more time we spend thinking about it, and the more of an influence it has.

One Woman's Quest to Become Barbie

There is one woman, Cindy Jackson, who was so influenced by Barbie that it became her life mission to look exactly like her. Her obsession to look like Barbie started when her parents bought her first Barbie at the age of six, and she didn't give up until she reached her goal. She ended up spending about \$55,000 and underwent 20 plastic surgery operations to reach her goal of becoming Barbie.(23)

20 operations!

Cindy's experience is just one more example of how impossible it is to reach this ideal image without major alterations of our natural beauty.

A 1965 Barbie Body Image Message

I couldn't believe this when I read it...

In 1965, Mattel came out with a "Slumber Party Barbie" that came complete with a bathroom scale permanently set at 110 pounds. The doll also came with a book entitled "How to Lose Weight" and inside this book was the advice: "Don't Eat." The matching Ken doll also came with slumber party accessories, but his were milk and cookies, sending a very different message.(24)

Barbie Transformed

Mattel received many criticisms about Barbie and the impact she was having on young girls around the world. In the summer of 2000, the company decided to change Barbie to a more modern look saying, “The new Barbie will have a more natural body shape—less busty with wider hips.”

What caused Mattel to make these changes? One influence may have been a drop in sales. According to the Los Angeles Business Journal, Barbie sales dropped from \$2 billion to \$1.5 billion in 1999.(25)

Barbie went under further changes in 2016 when Mattel released their line of new body shapes. The three new shapes included curvy, tall, and petite Barbie dolls, as well as featuring seven skin tones and 22 eye colors in addition to their new clothing line and hairstyles.(26)

We Weren't Meant to Be Barbie

I (Heather) recently read a blog post by Sheila Rhodes, founder of JesusGlitter.com. The post was called “Why I Never Wanted to Be a Barbie Doll.” She talked about how she played with Barbie dolls a lot when she was a child and realized that she would never measure up to them. Even as Mattel started changing the image of Barbie and giving her careers and cars, it just reinforced Rhodes’ belief that she would never have it all... and she began to realize why that was a good thing. One point I especially loved from her article was when she wrote, “Keep this in mind. Barbie was never real, but YOU are made in God’s image, not Mattel’s.”(27)

In a Tweet, she said, “God never expected girls to become a Barbie doll. We are not mass produced.” Those words really penetrated me. The world would have us believe that there is a beauty shaped cookie cutter, and if you don’t fit the mold, you don’t fit the bill. But that is so far from the truth! God created each of us uniquely in His image. We are all different, and we are all our own kind of beautiful.

It’s Not Just Barbie

Barbie is just one of countless influences in our lives. While I played with Barbie all the time as a child, her body image was never something that even crossed my

mind. The influences on my body image had more to do with how my body compared to the girls around me.

Most of my friends were obsessed with magazines. They were always learning new beauty and fashion tips and trying them out. I wanted to look like my friends, and they wanted to look like the girls in the magazines. So even though I wasn't directly comparing myself to media influences, it still had a huge influence on my life without me even realizing it at the time.

One thing I know affects my life more than anything else when it comes to media is books. I love to read. Whenever I get caught up in a good book, I notice that I take on some of the mannerisms of the heroine, and without realizing it, the words I read can affect my body image. Even non-fiction affects me. I read a book where the author wrote about how important it is not to have flabby arms, and I have been self-conscious about mine ever since. It sounds silly, but it's the truth.

Even though I don't remember doing it as a teen, I have noticed lately when I watch TV, I have moments where I think, "Oh, I wish I looked like her." Sometimes, I have moments of envy when watching movies about specific careers, or I see really talented women who do really awesome things and look good doing it. There's a good chance that TV shows and movies have been affecting my body image my entire life without me even realizing it, and now I'm just more aware of my thoughts.

Like we mentioned in the last chapter, being aware of the problem and admitting it is the first step towards healing. Now that I know the media is effecting my body image, God can help me apply His truths and overcome the lies I have been believing.

What About You?

What influences in your life have shaped (or are shaping) the way you see your body image?

Consider the media you take in on a daily basis: the magazines you read, the websites you surf, the television shows you watch, the video games you play, etc. How does seeing all these images impact you and your self-esteem?

If images don't affect you, what about print or audio media? How much of an impact does what the media says have in your life?

Are there any changes you need to make in your media choices?

— *Share Your Thoughts* —

Does Barbie Influences Girls Today?

Do you think playing with dolls like Barbie gives us an unrealistic “standard” of what we should look like? If you aren’t influenced by Barbie, what media has been the most powerful in your life?

Share your opinion and read what others have to say at <http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>



Do You Like Me?

The Hidden Power of Social Media

Have you ever seen the movie *Bad Hair Day*? In it, the main girl is running for homecoming queen, and she rules social media. She has an online poll for everything. What dress should she wear? Which way should she do her hair? Well, it ends up as a big disaster. Anyway, in the beginning, she was incapable of making decisions on her own; she needed input from others. Obviously, she took social media to an extreme, but social media addiction is actually really common and usually much subtler.

In her book, *Reforming Social Media*, Mandy J. Hoffman wrote, “Many of us use social media to fill a void—loneliness, boredom, and much more. Just like using drugs and alcohol to numb the pain can and often does lead to addiction, using social media to fill the void of relationships or other needs often leads to addiction as well.”(28)

How can you tell if you are addicted to social media? What if we asked you to try and avoid social media for a whole day? Could you do it?

When I (Heather) first attempted to avoid social media, I didn’t even try avoiding it for a whole day. My goal was to not use it when I was with my friends or family. And honestly, I couldn’t do it. With social media at our finger tips, it was extremely hard for me to carry my phone around and not pop open Facebook or Instagram when I got bored. I ended up rationalizing that it was okay for one reason or another, but it was a real problem. The more I gave in, the easier it

became, and before I knew it, I was back to using social media all the time, regardless of what I was supposed to be doing or who I was ignoring next to me.

One author said, “The addictive aspect of social networking is associated with FOMO -- fear of missing out.”(29) We are afraid that if we don’t check in on social media, that we will miss something. This is the driving force behind me checking my email a million times each day, but I never associated it with social media. The main factor for me is that when I get bored, it’s something that is super easy to access and a way to occupy my mind.

However, even though social media is easy, it can still pose a problem.

Did you know that “Many women admit that their self-esteem is related to how many likes, comments, and followers they get on social media. One study showed that positive feedback on social media stimulated the reward-region of the brain. The same region that most addictions stem from, leading to feelings of depression...”?(30)

Facebook Depression: It’s A Real Thing

In 2011, the term “Facebook Depression” was coined by the American Academy of Pediatrics.(31) Since then, it has been the focus of many studies and articles. Everyone wants to know if it’s a real thing: it is. While depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in your brain, feelings of depression can be brought on by many different things, including the dreaded comparison trap.

Here are a few ways social media can trigger depressive thoughts:

- ~ Seeing the highlights from everyone else’s life while living with the good, bad, and ugly when it comes to our own.
- ~ Seeing everything we miss out on (parties, award ceremonies, trips to the mall, lunch dates, etc.).
- ~ Seeing high engagement on other people’s posts and not our own.
- ~ Putting a number to how many friends we have and easily comparing our popularity to others.
- ~ Feeling like we don’t measure up.

~ Being exposed to cyber bullying and online criticism.

Here's the big one for me:

~ Social media adds the pressure of looking picture perfect and share-worthy all the time.

We have all heard that a photo is worth a thousand words, so if that's true, then Instagram says it all. In an article about why Instagram is more depressing than Facebook, Jessica Winter wrote, "Instagram is exclusively image-driven, and images will crack your mirror."[\(32\)](#)

False Impressions

Now, I'll be honest, I love Instagram. It's my favorite social media site, but with it comes a ton of pressure to post quality photos. It's not so much about who you are or what you have to say, but what your image is. Instagram experts tell us to take a dozen or more photos and then pick the very best one to present to the world. And I think we all do that to some degree. We share only the best. We might take a million photos and then share one or none if we decide that we don't look good enough that day or if the lighting is wrong. Yet, when we look at other people's photos, we assume that it was the first time shot and they really just look that good all the time.

In other words, we give people the false impression that our life is literally picture perfect all the time. We don't want to share moments that aren't flattering, and we inadvertently end up adding to the lie that if your life isn't always picture perfect, then you are less-than or a failure.

A while back, I watched a short video about Instagram vs. Reality. It was a little too graphic for me to want to share, but the clip had a really good point behind it. It showed some photos from Instagram and then the behind the scenes look at what was really going on. For instance, the "Girls night out?" photo the creators shared perfectly captured high-heels and a glass of wine. But in real life, the lady was sitting on her couch in her pajamas and high-heels. So even though a picture is worth a thousand words, it can definitely be misleading.

The Gospel Filter

A total game changer for me when it came to Instagram was learning how to edit my photos. Using the right filter or changing the lighting of a photo, can drastically improve its image and totally change the way it looks.

The same thing can be true when it comes to our lives. If we change the filter we are using, it can change our entire outlook. I remember several years ago when I really started to think about the golden rule. It's found in the Bible in a couple of places, but I really like the way the Amplified Bible says it in Luke 6:31. It says, "*Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.*"

What really revolutionized my thinking was when I realized that I should **think** about others the way I wanted them to think about me. Do I want them to give me the benefit of a doubt? Do I want them talking about me behind my back? How would I want them to handle the situation if it were reversed? What if I was the one who messed up? Would I want them to forgive me?

Even more than the golden rule, the filter that changed my outlook on life the most was what I call "The Gospel Filter."

John 3:16 says, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" What changed my view was the fact that God love the world. Not just me, but everyone. He created all of us. He loves all of us. That means my sister, the cashier at the grocery store, and the people that do me wrong.

When I looked around and started viewing everyone as God's masterpieces, as sinners in need of a Savior (just like me), it changed everything. There is a video that goes around Facebook every year or so that shows a guy being handed a pair of glasses, and when he looks through them, he sees what everyone else is going through, or what they want, need, or feel on a deeper level.

That's what the gospel filter does. It helps you look at people through God's eyes. You might not be able to see the depths of their souls, but it helps me to think beyond myself and my feelings to the bigger picture.

I think that's the essence of the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. When Jesus summarized the entire law of God, He said that was one of the two most important things we can do. His two things were, "*Love the Lord your God*

with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” And “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

If you really think about it, that commandment and the golden rule go hand-in-hand. It’s all part of applying the gospel filter.

Saving Social Media

We talked about how the number of likes and comments affect us, but another area we have to watch out for on social media is cyber bullying and online harassment. It’s a lot easier to talk trash behind a computer screen, especially if you use networking sites that are anonymous or that only leave content up for a short period of time. It can be really easy to jump on the bandwagon and start putting someone down.

We forget that there is a person on the other end of that profile with real feelings. Which is where applying the gospel filter to social media comes into play. Think about how you would feel if you were on the receiving end of a demeaning comment, meme, or post.

However, social media can also be used to encourage others and build them up (1 Thessalonians 5:11). How you use social media is all up to you. Do you use it to put others down and share your own highlight reel? Do you use it to complain all the time about how bad your life is? Or do you use it as an outlet for your true beauty and a way for God’s light to shine through you?

Social media can absolutely skew our view of beauty. It can damage our self-esteem or give us false confidence, but only if we let it. To quote Mandy J. Hoffman again, “God can, and will, use social media for *His glory and our good.*”(33) She recommends asking yourself the following questions:

~ “Does my time on social media glorify God?”

~ “Does it make me or others think more highly of Him?”

~ “Does it spread His fame and glory throughout whatever realm you are posting in?”(34)

We would add the questions:

- ~ Do my posts build others up or tear them down?
- ~ How would I feel if I were on the receiving end of a comment, post, or meme?
- ~ Does my post depict the truth, or is it misleading?

———— *Share Your Thoughts* ————

How has Social Media Impacted Your Life?

Has social media distorted your view of yourself or others? How do you think it impacts our lives as young women?

Share your thoughts and read what others had to say at
<http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>



Self-Esteem

Breaking Free from the Lies

Over the next few chapters, we are going to look at how some of the lies the media is feeding us effects our self-esteem and body image. But before we do so, we want to start by sharing an illustration about weeds.

What is important when weeding a garden? The recognition of which plants are weeds, right? Otherwise, you may uproot the good with the bad, or allow certain weeds to continue to take root, thinking they are the plants you want to grow.

Isn't the same is true in our lives in regards to our thoughts? We need to develop "weed recognition," the ability to recognize when the enemy is planting those weeds of lies into our lives. Even Jesus said that people will know us by our fruit (Matthew 7:15-20). In my life (Shelley), learning to recognize the weeds has made a huge difference as I've learned how to gain self-esteem.

In his book, *Waking the Dead*, John Eldredge(35) says, "Most of us simply try to 'put things behind us,' get past it, forget the pain as quickly as we can. Really—denial is a favorite method for coping for many Christians. But not with Jesus. He wants truth in the inmost being, and to get it there he's got to take us into our inmost being... to go with him into the deep waters of the heart, uncover the lies buried down there, and bring in the truth that will set us free. Don't just bury it quickly; ask God what he is wanting to speak to."

Recognizing and uprooting the weeds or lies in your life is the first step in learning how to gain self-esteem. Often times, those thoughts that keep coming up in your

mind again and again that tear you down instead of build you up will be those lies. In other words, “Stinkin’ Thinkin’” as my mom calls it.

Realize that those defeating thoughts are not from God, but from your enemy, Satan, who wants to destroy you and keep you captive (John 8:43-45, John 10:10, Isaiah 61:1-4).

Stinkin’ Thinkin’

Here are some examples of Stinkin’ Thinkin’

I am worthless.

People I trust will hurt and betray me; therefore, I can’t trust anyone.

I’m not as good as my friends.

Something’s wrong with me.

I am ugly.

I have to be perfect for people to like me.

I am a failure and always mess up.

I am not good enough.

In place of those lies, begin to plant the seed of God’s truth into your mind (2 Corinthians 10:5). We are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2), and the only way to renew our minds is to change what goes into it.

Did you know that one way people are trained to recognize counterfeit money is by studying the real thing? Therefore, one way we can get better at recognizing the lies is to know God’s Truth in the Bible so well that we can quickly recognize those thoughts that aren’t from Him. Unfortunately, there is no shortcut for this step. The seed of truth may take time to grow; it’s hard work, but it is worth it!

One great way to plant seeds of truth is to memorize Bible scriptures. I know it sounds boring, but think of it as a way to prepare for battle. I have found it to be one of the most effective ways for me to have victory over Satan in my life.

Something else that has really helped me is praying God’s Word. If you are having difficulty overcoming a specific struggle in your life, I’d recommend trying it. It’s changed my life. You can find more information on both of these options in the appendix of this book (A2).

Before we move on, I think it's also important to note that the more we feed these weeds, the longer we believe the lies, the bigger this "weed monster" grows, and the more damage it causes. It seems innocent at first, but it just keeps growing and consuming us bit by bit.

Taming the Beast

I (Heather) planted a new flower garden this year. I have been wanting to plant it for years, and finally got around to it. My husband helped till it up and put down fresh soil, and we planted a ton of flower seeds. But when plants started coming up, I couldn't tell what they were. I didn't know what I was looking for, so I didn't pull any weeds. I just waited it out until they were bigger so I could see which was which.

Now, instead of having the beautiful flowerbed I envisioned, I have a weed patch. There are so many weeds that it's hard to see the flowers that are blooming, and they are all fighting for space, sun, and water. Part of me is tempted to give up and just mow it all over, but I really do love flowers and would love to be able to enjoy them.

I think sometimes we feel that way in life, too. We get overwhelmed by all the weeds to the point we can barely see the good stuff. And when we do see the good stuff, we know it's surrounded by all the ugly stuff, so we wonder if it's even worth it. Have you ever been there? I know I have. The thing is, that's just another lie Satan is telling us to keep us from overcoming the weeds and being able to really enjoy life; to keep us from learning how to gain self-esteem and true freedom in Christ.

Weeding Out the Lies

In Chester and Betsy Kylstra's book, *Biblical Healing and Deliverance*, they included some practical steps for replacing lies with the truth. The following checklist is based off their original list: [\(36\)](#)

1. **Identify possible lies** you have been believing about yourself and write them down. If you don't know what they might be, pray for God to help you see them, or ask your friends or family if they have heard you say anything about yourself that wasn't true.
2. **Choose** one of those lies to focus on.

3. **Recognize God's truth.** Write it out and incorporate it into your belief system as the replacement for the previously removed lie.
4. **Reject the lie** and break its power from your life based on what Jesus did for you by dying on the cross.
5. **Confess** to God through prayer that you have been believing this lie rather than the truth and living your life according to this lie.
6. **Repent** by asking for God's forgiveness for living your life based upon this lie and ask Him for the strength to change your thinking.
7. If necessary, **forgive** your parents or anyone else that may have encouraged you to believe this lie.
8. **Pray**
 - ~ That God would bring an end to the effects of this lie in your life.
 - ~ For this truth to be planted in your heart.
 - ~ That the Word of God already in your heart will be brought to the surface of your mind to use as a weapon against future defeating thoughts (Ephesians 6).
 - ~ For the discipline to meditate on this new truth for at least 30 days.
 - ~ That the Holy Spirit would make you sensitive to falling back into old thought patterns and to be able to take captive any such thoughts.
 - ~ For new habits to be formed in your mind as you learn how to gain self-esteem.
9. **Accountability.** Last but not least, have someone you trust hold you accountable to replacing the lie with God's truth.

Repeat the above list for all of the lies you have been believing, one at a time, until you have taken back control of your thought life from Satan.

Remember, weeding out lies is just one step in learning how to gain self-esteem. We can tell you from personal experience that it is powerful when you apply it.

But you don't have to take our word for it. You can read Kandace's story for yourself.

Princess Kandace

By Kandace

It all started when I was in elementary school. People made fun of my forehead, and at first I didn't think it was big but then I started believing it since I heard it more. Middle school was torture. I always had a boy who liked me that would be mean to me. This particular boy who liked me would pick fun at me. I didn't know why he would be so mean and hurt my feelings but he did.

I cut my hair to make bangs so I could hide my forehead. That solved my problems for a little while. He still would make fun of me, only him. He had a friend who he hung around with, and his friend thought I was cute, and we were cool. I would always compare myself to the popular girls. I caught myself trying to be like other girls. Why did all the cute guys like those girls? Since I'm African American, guys are attracted to girls who have big butts and loud mouths. I had none of these traits.

That 7th grade summer, I went to a camp for teens with my church. That's when the healing began. I started being my own self, and I started getting more friends. But I still had the forehead issue. 8th grade was still torture. This time it was a new guy. He was kind of popular, and that was kind of hurtful. He was the class clown, and he would clown on me. I did, however, manage to get the word of God known to some people at the school.

High school was the breaking point for me. I started to get acne because I wore "swoops" and bangs so much. One day in the 9th grade, I was just tired. I think God troubled my spirit so much that I just push my bangs back for the first time in my life and did not care. That was the best thing I could have ever done.

Yeah, I got comments, but I trusted God, and you know what, I didn't care what people had to say. Yeah, there was this guy who had a joke, but I couldn't have cared less.

I've been showing my forehead for a year now, and I see nothing wrong with the way God made me. I look at myself as unique. If I didn't have my forehead or my eyes, then I would look like guys expect me to look like, and I don't want

that. I want to look like Kandace, a child of God, not some video girl who has no significant value. Since my father is a King, I'm royalty. I am a princess.

— *Share Your Thoughts* —

How has God been working in your life lately? Have you seen any lies that you have been believing that God is helping you replace with His truth? It could be something big or something little. Share your story and read what others have to say at <http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>



Body Image Lies

Have You Fallen for This One?

As females, most of us have struggled with body image lies, especially this one: *If I can change something about my body, others will finally accept me, and I will be able to accept myself.*

It is so easy to base our self-worth on our looks and our outer appearance because it is the first thing others see. Plus, there are mirrors, windows, and cameras everywhere that constantly remind us of our appearance.

As I (Shelley) started to work on this area in my life, I realized one day that I was addicted to mirrors. I was always checking my appearance to see if I looked okay. Some days, I felt good about what I saw and thought that my hair and/or outfit was cute. However, there were other days I couldn't wait to get home and hide.

Do you ever feel that way?

One way to know whether or not you are also addicted to mirrors is to deliberately try to avoid them for a day or two. Like me, you may realize they are more of an obsession or addiction than you realized.

What Would You Change About Your Body?

If you could change one detail about your body, what would you change?

I know my answer without even thinking about it. I bet most of you already know your answer too. The detail I've struggled with the most has been my acne and the scars it has left behind.

In high school, I had a perfect complexion. I even remember someone commenting that my skin looked like a china doll. Well, that complexion ended when I entered college. I'm not sure exactly what caused it—possibly the combination of bad eating habits and hormones. I thought it would just be a short phase and then be gone, but here I am, now in my 30's and still struggling with breakouts of acne.

UUUGGGGHHHH!!

I have tried everything from Mary Kay to ProActiv and Arbonne to hormone creams, but nothing has worked. Plus, I have the scars that the acne has left behind to look at every day in the mirror.

How did I cope?

To compensate for the acne and try to cover it up, I began wearing a lot of makeup. One day, I felt challenged by God to go out to eat with my husband, CJ, without wearing any makeup. I wasn't sure I understood correctly. Go without any makeup?? Surely not.

I asked God, "Are you sure you want me to do this?"

You see, I was using makeup as a means of self-protection and to feel better about myself. To go out without any makeup literally felt like I was leaving the house naked. How embarrassing and devastating!

Well, I did end up obeying God that night and left without a trace of makeup. After a few minutes, I couldn't stand it any longer, so I asked my husband if he noticed anything different about my appearance.

He looked at me and hesitantly said, "You're wearing a new headband?"

I said, "Yes, I am wearing a new headband, but do you notice anything else about my appearance?"

He said, "No, I don't."

How ironic. Here I felt "naked" and self-conscious, and he didn't even notice!

What I learned from that experiment is that most people don't notice my imperfections nearly as much as I do. I'm much harder on myself.

What is the Truth?

The truth is that my value comes from God, my Creator, and not from my appearance or what others think of me.

God is teaching me this truth that my value comes from Him and not from my outward appearance. It is okay to desire beauty—it's a God given desire—but not to base my self-esteem on it.

Wait, No Makeup?!

All right girls, some of you may have panicked for a moment when you read that Shelley went without makeup. Am I right? Moment of truth here, I (Heather) don't wear makeup. I have never worn it on a regular basis, and I haven't worn it a single time in almost ten years (unless you count nail polish).

Do I think wearing makeup is wrong? No, of course not. I just don't think makeup is the answer to beauty.

That said, while I don't wear makeup, I do spend more time than necessary trying to decide what to wear, changing clothes, etc. And it's all part of the same lie: Our value or worth is in what meets the eye. If we don't wear the right thing or look a certain way, we think we will be looked down on and ugly.

There are two Bible verses that God has really used in my life when it comes to understanding the value of my true beauty: 1 Corinthians 6:19 where it says, "...*your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit,*" and Matthew 23:17 when Jesus asked, "*Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?*"

The Temple of God

Did you catch that? Our bodies are temples of the living God. When I learned that in youth group, it was always with the reminder that we belong to God and need to take care of our bodies. We are "Temple Keepers." But Jesus took the time to remind us that it isn't the gold (or the makeup or clothing) that makes the temple great, but the One who lives in it.

If you have accepted Christ as your Savior, you are a temple of God, and you have the Holy Spirit living in you. Stop and think about that for a moment. The God who created the entire universe resides in your heart. You aren't too small for Him.

You aren't too insignificant. You are His temple. The beauty of His light shining out of you has the power to outshine your outer appearance completely.

Have you ever been to the Sistine Chapel? I haven't, but I have heard it is breathtakingly beautiful. Even if you haven't been there, you probably know that it is famous for its painted ceilings. But did you know, while they have done a marvelous job keeping the paintings vibrant and beautiful, some of the floor tiles are cracked? The tile work that was done on the floor is gorgeous, but there are places where it has cracked or chipped over the years. It's no longer perfect.

If you walked into the Sistine Chapel, do you think that would ruin its beauty? Of course not. You probably wouldn't have even noticed if I hadn't told you. If you did notice, it probably would have just been in passing. After all, you aren't there to look at the floors.

I think in a way we are just like the Sistine Chapel. Our beauty doesn't come from the floors or the things we put on. Instead, just as the Sistine Chapel gets its beauty from the paintings, we get our beauty from Christ living inside of us. It's not something that changes at the end of the day.

However, there is one major way that our beauty differs from that of the Sistine Chapel. The true beauty that comes from Christ can't be stripped down, it doesn't fade over time, and it doesn't need to be touched up. True beauty is everlasting, never failing, and it grows as time goes by.

While it's easy to see that beauty in the Sistine Chapel, it's not always easy to see that beauty in ourselves. We get caught up in the cracks on the floor and get so fixated on them that we forget to look up.

At the beginning of the chapter, Shelley asked what you would change about your body. We all have different lies we believe about ourselves, our cracks on the floor so to speak, but we all have them. Your answer may be different than ours; it may even vary from day to day (mine does), but I bet it's still there. Here's what Rehan had to say...

"I've always had a problem with my nose as it's too big. Whenever I make new friends, I always get a feeling that they don't like talking to me much because of my physical appearance. I just don't know how to deal with the loneliness and depression I've had since I was 14 or so." ~ Rehan

Overcoming Lies with the Truth

I (Shelley) know loneliness; it has been one of my deepest hurts. It connects back to some circumstances and events that happened when I was a child. Ultimately, I realized that I was “drinking from a broken cup”—trying on my own to find satisfaction from life that I can really only get from God.

God is healing me, but it is still a struggle not to believe the lie *that I am alone, that I don't fit with the others, that I am left out and on the outside, that I am different*. In fact, just yesterday I was feeling that same thing again, believing that same lie again. I wrote out that lie, and then I wrote out the truth.

The truth is that *I am never alone. Jesus, my biggest fan and supporter, is always with me. I am always included in what Jesus is doing if I decide to join Him. I am Jesus' friend, and He tells me His secrets and connects with me deeply.*

See the difference? Once I realized the lie I believed and replaced it with the truth, the melancholy feeling that came over me began to lift.

I want to share a few thoughts from the book *Comfortable in your own skin, making peace with your body image* by Dr. Deborah Newman.(37) One thing she says is, “Your self-esteem isn't as much about how you look right now as it is about what you think about how you look right now.”(38)

She gave an example of how a woman lost a lot of weight and afterwards was asked out on a date. The guy canceled, and she automatically thought he canceled because he didn't like her and he thought she would gain all her weight back and wouldn't stay thin. Well, she came to find out that he really was sick and those thoughts were lies she believed. Even though she had lost the weight, she still struggled with her self-esteem.

Dr. Newman wrote that the truth is “Healthy self-esteem comes from believing in the value God places in you, not in the value man assigns to you.”(39)

Another lie she addresses is that “My outward appearance is the most important thing about me... The truth: Your outward appearance is what people will first judge you by, but your personality, confidence, talents and abilities, and spiritual sensitivity are each vital to who you are as well.”(40)

The last quote from her book I want to share is this. She says, “I like to think of our bodies as the garage for our souls, where we are parked temporarily while we live on this earth. The health, appearance, and abilities of our bodies affect what we do on this earth, but they are not all of who we are. They are significant to us for our time on earth, but will not last for eternity.”(41)

What Does the Bible Have to Say About Body Image?

We have talked about some of the lies we have fallen for, and the truth’s we have found hidden in God’s Word. But now, we want to share five passages from the Bible that apply to our body images. Some of them we have mentioned before, but they are definitely worth repeating.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” ~ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” ~ Romans 12:2

“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 man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’” ~ 1 Samuel 16:7

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” ~ Psalms 139:14-16

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” ~ Philippians 3:20-21

Our Beauty Comes From God

I want to close this chapter with something a friend of mine, Annika Lampmann,[\(42\)](#) wrote.

My precious daughter, your body is not an object.

I made you fearfully and wonderfully. My works are marvelous and your soul can believe this. (Psalms 139:14)

You are BEAUTIFUL and PERFECT, just as you are.

All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you. (Song of Solomon 4:7)

Look at yourself through my eyes and be amazed.

Your Dad, Your God, Your Creator.

Father, show me my beauty. Show me what you see when you look at me and show me what you put inside my heart. I want to be rooted in your love and bloom like a beautiful rose.

Fill me up with your spirit and with your thoughts. Let me see others and myself through your eyes, Jesus. Amen.

———— Share Your Thoughts ————

How About You? What is One Thing You Want to Change About Your Body?

Has this lie impacted your self-esteem or your relationship with God or others?

The Lie: “If I can change something about my body, others will finally accept me, and I will be able to accept myself.”

You have read our stories, as well as stories from Amber, Kandace, and Rehan. Now, it’s time to tell yours. Share your opinion and read what others have to say at <http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>.



My Design

Were We Created On Purpose?

You may or may not have heard of the big debate about evolution vs. creationism. We aren't here to debate that issue, but we do want to challenge you to consider its impact on girls today. Is there a connection between where we came from and our self-esteem?

A Deeper Issue?

Is there more to the onslaught of low self-esteem and body image issues teen girls and women face today? Could there be something deeper going on? We think there is.

We believe there is a battle for our souls.

We believe it is a spiritual battle. A battle between good and evil. A battle waging in the heavens between God and Satan. A battle for you. For us.

It's subtle. Many times it comes through our thoughts. Subtle lies that we end up latching onto and believing.

Our enemy, Satan, may try to convince us to believe that

- ~ We have no real value and are worthless.
- ~ We have no real beauty to offer to anyone; we are ugly.
- ~ We have no real purpose, and our lives are meaningless.
- ~ We have no real relationships; no one truly cares about us.

- ~ We don't matter in the grand scheme of things.
- ~ We are a waste of space.

Did any of those statements resonate with you? Those thoughts can have major implications if we begin to bite into them, if we begin to believe them.

What is the result?

Broken, lifeless, defeated lives. We may experience sparks of real life from time to time, but in general, we live with a deep ache inside. A sense that we don't belong. A sense that there's something wrong with us. We know from experience.

Evolution vs. Creation

What if some of these thoughts could originate from something even deeper?

Most schools today teach that the earth was created from nothing. That there was a big bang that set the universe in motion. That over millions of year's life evolved by chance. That all of that is scientifically proven.

What is the result?

We come to the conclusion that there is no need for an intelligent designer of our universe, that we are simply animals that evolved from lifeless cells millions of years ago; we are cosmic accidents. You see, when we believe that an intelligent designer, or Creator, of this universe created us with love and value and thought, then we see ourselves differently.

How does evolution vs. creationism impact us in our search for true beauty and meaning in life? Think about it. If you evolved from lifeless, meaningless cells over millions of years, does your life really matter?

But What If There Is More?

What if there is more to what we see all around us? Doesn't the beauty, complexity, and magnificence of the world ever make you wonder?

I (Shelley) recently read something by Mark Cahill that made sense to me. He said, "Every time we look at something built by man—a house, for example—we know it had a builder, someone who assembled it. When we see something that has design, like a watch, we know it had a designer who planned it. When we see

artwork, like a painting, we know there is an artist who painted it. When we observe order—say 20 Coke cups lined up in a row—we know there was an ‘orderer’ who set them up that way.

“When we look around the universe at things not made by man, what do we see? We see creation, design, art, and order. So if everything man-made has a creator, designer, artist, or orderer behind it, why would you not think there is a Creator, Designer, Artist, and Orderer behind the universe?

“Why is it that when we look at Mount Rushmore, we don’t say, ‘Wow, erosion is an amazing thing! Look how it formed the heads of four presidents of the United States’? We realize that would be a foolish statement. Whenever we see creation, design, art, or order, it’s obvious that there was some intelligent force behind it to make it happen.”(43)

Then Cahill went on to tell this story:

“I was talking with a man one day in downtown Atlanta, and I asked him a question about spiritual matters. He replied that he was an atheist, and there was no way to prove there is a God. We were standing among tall buildings, so I pointed to one of the skyscrapers and said, ‘Prove to me that there was a builder for that building.’

“He answered, ‘That’s easy. The building itself is proof that there is a builder.’...

“I said, ‘Exactly. The building is proof that there is a builder.’ I then added, ‘The sun, the moon, the stars, the oceans, the sand, each unique snowflake, the 3 billion pieces of your DNA that are different from mine, are absolute proof that there had to be a Creator of this universe.’ He looked at me. I could see the light bulb flash on behind his eyes and then he glanced away. As he thought about the statement, he realized he had proved his own proof.”(44)

What Cahill was getting at is that just because you can’t see someone, doesn’t mean they don’t exist. Just like that building was proof that a builder existed, we are living proof that our universe has a Creator.

Dr. Rice Brooks, author of *God’s Not Dead*, used the example of pocket texting. Have you ever pocket texted someone? It used to be a lot more common before they came out with touch screen phones that were password protected, but

essentially, you have your phone in your pocket, and it randomly texts someone on your contact list because you brushed up against it.

Usually pocket texts are completely random, such as “jjjjjjjjm.” The chances of texting someone a complete sentence that you haven’t said before are slim to none. Texts that make sense have to have someone actually type them out. Like the 3 billion pieces of DNA in Cahill’s example. The chances of it randomly forming the building blocks of the human race are virtually non-existent. Someone had to orchestrate it.

So what if we did have an intelligent designer, a Creator?

That would mean

- ~ We were created with real value, and are worthwhile.
- ~ We were designed with true beauty to offer to others.
- ~ We have real purpose and meaning in life.
- ~ We are meant to have meaningful relationships with our Creator and others.
- ~ We matter.
- ~ We are precious and loved.

See the difference?

On one hand, we are an insignificant accident, but on the other one, we were created on purpose and for a purpose.

What About Science?

You may be wondering if this is all wishful thinking on our part. You could wonder about how we can ignore science in favor of faith. The answer is simple: we’re not.

The thing about science is if you have an idea that you can explain and defend, then test it or observe it without finding it false, it can become a scientific theory. You haven’t proven it is a fact; you just haven’t proven it’s false. It can remain a theory until someone can prove it’s false. Thus, the theory of evolution and the theory of creation are both scientific theories that have supporting evidence. Neither one has ever been proven as a fact or found false.

Evolution and creation are scientifically equal.

In fact, there are ministries and organizations dedicated to proving each of the theories independently, but as of now, they are both considered scientifically sound, even though they can't both be right. As we said at the beginning of this chapter, we aren't here to debate these two theories, but we do believe that the difference between them has a huge impact on how we see ourselves.

If you're still struggling with the evolution vs. creationism idea, I (Shelley) recommend reading chapter two of Mark Cahill's book, *One Heartbeat Away, Your Journey into Eternity*.[\(45\)](#) He explains microevolution vs. macroevolution, transitional forms, and more. It helped me better understand why creation really does make sense when you truly take the time to examine the claims and evidence of evolution. Heather found the website Answers in Genesis helpful in her own search for understanding. Both are great resources.

Now it's time for you to decide for yourself, but first, we are going to move onto another source that has been found to affect our self-esteem: our fathers.



Daddy's Little Girl

The Importance of a Father's Love

You'll often hear someone say, "She's Daddy's little girl." Deep down, I (Shelley) think being "Daddy's little girl" is something we girls long for... to be loved, cherished, and treasured by our fathers.

However, the reality is that many of us grew up without the stability, security, and protection of a loving father. Instead, our fathers may be distant emotionally, absent from the home, too busy working, abusive, or neglectful. And we may leave childhood feeling unloved by our dads for one reason or another.

Fathers will have an impact on their daughter's life, either positively or negatively. Don't get us wrong, a mother's nurturing love is essential. In fact, statistics show that when we are in our teen years, we are more likely to turn to our moms or our male peers when we feel bad about ourselves, as opposed to looking to both our moms and dads when we are younger.[\(46\)](#)

We need the love from both our mothers and our fathers, but they each impact us differently. Here are some of the ways our dads impact us:

- ~ They teach us how to interact with guys.
- ~ They teach us how a guy should treat a girl.

~ They are the first man in our lives who has the opportunity to affirm our beauty and teach us that our beauty goes beyond skin deep.

~ They model to us how a husband should treat his wife.

Growing up, did you feel secure and protected in your father's love? Did you know that he had your best interests in mind? Did your dad affirm your beauty and worth and show you respect?

Unfortunately, many girls do not receive affirmation and love from their fathers; therefore, it's easy to go looking for those things somewhere else. We long to be loved, so we turn to other guys in search of that feeling. You can read more about this when Shelley shares her story on dating. But right now, I (Heather) want to share my story with you.

Father Figures

Growing up, I had more than one picture of what a dad should look like in my life. My parents divorced when I was super young. In fact, I don't remember ever living with my dad. Yet even though I didn't live with him and really didn't see him that often, I was a daddy's girl at heart. I wanted his attention, and I wanted him to love me.

For the short periods of time when I did see him, I felt like a princess, but then he would be gone again. It's hard to put into words what I felt as a child, but I know I missed him and would have done almost anything to have him in my life full-time.

In between my 1st and 2nd grade years, my mom re-married a man who sexually abused me. I had no idea what a real father's love looked like at this point in my life, and I honestly believe my stepfather played on my insecurities. I wanted a dad. He was supposed to show me what a real father-daughter relationship looked like, but it was all wrong, and I didn't even realize it.

I'll continue that story later, but he is the dad that I really grew up with. Even after the abuse stopped, I lived with him until I was in high school and that relationship with him tainted my entire life.

The third dad I grew up with was actually my best friend's dad. He was the dad I idolized. To me, he was everything a dad should be, and he wasn't mine. Growing up, I knew that was what I wanted, but about the time we graduated high school, I

started realizing he wasn't perfect either. He was still the best dad I knew, I just started realizing that he was human.

The Impact on Our Relationship with God

Sometimes, we end up projecting our feelings about our earthly fathers onto our heavenly Father. If we feel like our earthly father is distant emotionally from us, we may assume that our heavenly Father is the same. If our earthly father has disappointed us and let us down, we may think that our heavenly Father will disappoint us as well. If our earthly father wasn't safe for us, but instead was abusive, we may have a difficult time trusting our heavenly Father to be a safe haven for us.

Do you see how this can happen?

It never happened for me, maybe because I had so many examples of what a father looked like. I knew my dad should have been there for me. I learned that my stepfather had broken the law and hurt me in ways he shouldn't have. I understood from a very young age that dads made mistakes. And by God's grace, I never thought God could be anything like them. But that's not always the case.

My View of God

I (Shelley) had to realize that God is not like my dad. He won't let me down or disappoint me. I had to be reminded of the character of God, my heavenly Father, through His Word, the Bible. It shows over and over that God is loving and trustworthy and has my best interests in mind.

I slowly had to change the way I saw God or my view of God. You may have made that change as well.

You Can Have a Father Who Loves You Completely

Are you longing for someone to love you completely and unconditionally?

Well, before you try to find that love in all the wrong places, like I did, realize that you can find that love in your heavenly Father. It may be hard for you to accept His love right now. You may not feel very loveable, or you may doubt that God really cares for you.

It's okay to wrestle with those feelings. You are on a journey. A journey of discovering your true beauty. A beauty given to you by your heavenly Father, your Creator, who loves you completely. You were made by Him and for Him (Col 1:16).

Will you allow Him to love you and satisfy all your deepest longings? Will you let go of your past and forgive your earthly father for the ways he didn't provide that love for you?

Your heavenly Father is waiting for you. He says, "*Come near to me and I will come near to you*" (James 4:8). He offers to love you completely (Ephesians 3:19) as a Father should, and nothing can separate you from His love (Romans 8:35-39).

One of Heather's favorite songs is "Good Good Father." We encourage you to look up that song on YouTube and really listen to the words. "*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are*" (1 John 3:1a)!



God's Word

What Do You Believe?

You have probably noticed by now that we put a lot of stock into what God says in the Bible. It's our go-to source whenever we have a question. However, that hasn't always been the case.

When I (Heather) first became a Christian, I didn't really get what the Bible was saying or how a 2,000-year-old book was relevant to my life. To be honest, I thought it was sexist and outdated. I thought I could believe in its message without really buying into the whole thing... And I know I wasn't alone in my thinking.

We have already talked about the evolution vs. creationism debate. There are Christians on both sides of it; godly men and women who love Jesus, but aren't really sure that the Genesis account is accurate. Someone recently told me she wouldn't go to church because the pastor preached on the importance of modesty and even backed it up with Bible verses. I've heard people say that as long as you are a Christian, you can do whatever you want. All God cares about is whether or not you believe in Jesus.

You can twist your logic a million different ways, but someone once told me that either you believe in the Bible, or you don't. If it has one thing wrong, how can you believe any of it? The Bible is, in its entirety, the greatest story ever told. It's either fact or fiction. It can't be both.

What Do You Believe?

I (Shelley) have been a Christian for many years, and to be honest, I had blind faith in the Bible. I believed it was God's Word because the Church told me it was. I also had faith in the Bible because its message had changed my life. At one time, that was enough for me, but recently, I went on a journey to find evidence for myself. I found that there is actually a lot of evidence to back up what the Bible says.

I believe that our enemy, Satan, would like us to think the Bible is full of errors or fairytales. He wants us to believe that it's outdated or irrelevant, just like Heather did. If he can get us to not trust or believe that the Bible is true, we won't have access to the power and freedom that comes from hearing from God through His Word.

So, let's take a few minutes and find out why we can put our full trust in the Bible as God speaking to us.

Bible Facts

When we look at a book, how can we know that it's true?

First of all, it really doesn't matter what we believe about it. The only thing that matters is what is true.

Truth by definition is always narrow. It has one right answer and many wrong answers. For example, $2+2=4$. One right answer and countless wrong answers. Another example, who is the current president of the United States? One right answer and anything else is wrong.

The same concept applies for eternal truth. Eternal truth will also be narrow. We want to make sure we have the right answer. Truth is not what we believe or feel it is. We may believe the sky is green, but it's not. It's blue. We may believe the earth is flat, but it's not. It's round.

So how do we know eternal truth?

I have to admit that I've struggled with accepting the Bible as eternal, absolute truth. As I searched for answers, I found some that make sense to me.

By the way, many of the concepts I am sharing are taken from chapter three in Mark Cahill's book, *One Heartbeat Away, Your Journey into Eternity*.⁽⁴⁷⁾ I highly recommend it if you're searching for spiritual truth.

Let me explain to you why the Bible is unique by sharing a few interesting Bible facts...

#1: The Bible Is the Best-Selling Book of All Time

How many Bibles, do you think are sold in one year? Any guesses?

100 million! And there are over 6 billion Bibles in print.

Just because the Bible is the best-selling book of all time doesn't mean it's truth. It does, however, mean that it's probably a book that's worth checking into. If that many people are buying it, there's probably something to it, especially because it isn't a passing fancy. Not only is it the #1 best-selling book, it has been #1 for as long as there has been a best-sellers list.

#2: The Bible Was Written by God

Did you know that over 3,000 times the Bible says, "*thus saith the Lord*"?

All other religious texts were written by a man (or woman) who claimed to be speaking for God. Only the Bible claims to be written by God, speaking to men. With that knowledge, is there any evidence to prove these supernatural words in the Bible? There is.

From history, archaeology, science, and prophecy we have a lot of evidence to show that the Bible is indeed the Word of God. Let's look briefly at it.

#3: Historical Evidence

First of all, there are over 24, 000 ancient copies of portions of the New Testament. The closest in all other books is Homer's Iliad, which has 643 ancient copies.

Secondly, the Bible itself does not have any contradictions within it. Some people will claim there are contradictions, but when you ask them for proof, they have a hard time naming them. If they can, their examples are usually taken out of context.

Thirdly, the external evidence for the Bible is incredible. A Roman historian named Tacitus and a Jewish historian named Josephus both support the historical accuracy of the Bible. Also 17 secular historians wrote about the death of Jesus by crucifixion. These facts could not have been made up by men, and show that external historical records support the Bible.

#4: Archaeological Evidence

More than 25,000 archaeological findings relating to people, places, and events in the Bible have been found. And believe it or not, not one of them has contradicted anything in the Bible. This evidence in and of itself is incredible proof of the Bible's trustworthiness.

Now, if we can believe the historical and archaeological evidence for the Bible, why do you think it's hard for us to believe the spiritual part of the book? Can we believe the spiritual part of the Bible? Let's investigate and see.

#5: Fulfilled Prophecies Validate the Bible

Did you know that approximately 25% of the entire contents of the Bible is prophecy? That means about 25% predicts future events, and to this date, every single one of them has come true to the smallest detail, except the remaining prophecies about the return of Jesus.

Statistically, there is no way any man can predict the future with 100% accuracy. Several other religions have prophecies that have proven false. They couldn't withstand the test of time. The Bible, however, has proven true every single time.

When someone repeatedly predict the future, and what they say repeatedly comes true, you can trust whoever predicted the future to 100% accuracy. The only one who can do this is the God of the Bible, which includes Jesus Christ. We have reason to put our full trust in the Bible as eternal truth.

What are some of the examples of fulfilled prophecies?

Here are a few

Micah 5:2 says the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. This prophecy is fulfilled in Luke 2:4-7.

Zechariah 11: 12-13 says the Messiah will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. This prophecy is fulfilled in Matthew 26:15.

Psalms 22, says the Messiah will be pierced in His hands and feet. This prophecy was written about 800 years before the crucifixion was ever used as a means of punishment. The New Testament says that Jesus was crucified on a cross and pierced in His hands and feet.

I want to share something that Mark Cahill wrote in his book that will give you a visual image of what we're talking about.

“Jesus Christ fulfilled more than 300 prophecies in his life. Here's something that can help you appreciate the odds of this happening: if only eight of those 300 prophecies came true in any one person, it would be comparable to this:

“Build a fence around the state of Texas, fill it 2 feet deep with silver dollars, paint one of them red, mix them all up, then, starting at the Louisiana border, walk blindfolded as far into Texas as you want to go. Then leaned over, still blindfolded, and pick up the red silver dollar.

“What do you think the chances are that you would pick up the red one? Would you bet your retirement fund picking up that red Silver Dollar? Would you bet your eternal life on odds like that?

“All of us do, because those are only the odds for eight prophecies coming true in one person. But Jesus had more than 300 prophecies about him come true.”(48)

How's that for an interesting Bible fact?

But Is the Bible Still Relevant?

I (Heather) mentioned that my problem wasn't that I had blind faith in the Bible; I believed every word. I just didn't see how it was relevant in the 21st century. I mean, it is thousands of years old. It couldn't possibly address modern clothing or social media, could it?

What I learned is that the Bible isn't written so much about culture and specifics as it is about the heart.

Hebrews 4:12 says, *“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”*

I like to think of it this way: God doesn't mess with technicalities, He cuts right to the heart of the matter and leaves no room for loop holes.

When I was younger, my mom once told me to come home when it got dark out. Well, I was really having a good time, and I didn't really want to go home, so I figured it wasn't really dark because the street lights were on, and they provided lots of light. You may be able to guess that my mom didn't think that stroke of genius was as cleaver as I did. Thus, my new curfew became when the street lights came on, which (you may know) happens way before it actually gets dark. That plan totally back fired on me, but the lesson I learned could easily apply to the way we see the Bible.

My mom gave me a clear guideline, but I manipulated it. I found a loop hole and exploited it, but in my heart I knew I wasn't really doing what my mom wanted.

I think God knows that we have a tendency to look for loop holes. We want to twist things until they work for us. And we do that with the Bible. We say, “well... God never said sexting wasn't okay,” or “you won't find anything about cuss words in the Bible.” Yet we know that while God didn't use those terms, He did address the heart issues.

For instance, the Bible doesn't say what qualifies as a cuss word, but it does say that we shouldn't use filthy language (Colossians 3:8). He told us not to let any unwholesome talk come out of our mouths, but instead only what will help those who are listening (Ephesians 4:29).

The Bible might not address sexting, but it does say that we should flee from sexual immorality and that our bodies aren't meant for other people, but for the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:18,13).

What it comes down to is that the Bible does not list out every single sin you could imagine, but it does say that if we know what the right thing to do is and we don't do it, that's sin (James 4:17). Because those words are written in the Bible, they really mean if we know what God would want us to do, and we don't do it, we sin. Or if we find out what we are doing isn't what God wants and keep doing it, that's sin.

It's pretty clear.

The way we learn what God would want from us is by reading His Word. When I first started reading the Bible, I couldn't see how it was relevant, but when I started looking past the letters on the page to the true meaning, it really came alive. That's why I started writing our *Teen Devotionals... for Girls!* series. I wanted to share what God was showing me through His Word with other girls. God really does have a lot to say, and every word is not only trustworthy, it's relevant to our lives today.

God's Love Letter to Us

The Bible is kind of like God's love letter to us. He wrote to tell us how He created us, prepared the world for us, and died to save us. He wrote to tell us that He loves us so much He not only did all of that, but that He is with us always. Every breath we take. He is preparing a home for us in eternity where the streets are paved with gold. He is seeing to every detail because we are His treasured possessions (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; Malachi 3:17).

And we either take Him at His Word, or we don't. My former youth pastor asked us once how we could face God on judgement day and tell Him we never took the time to read the book He spent years writing for us.

My question is, can you imagine standing face-to-face with the God who created the universe, who loves you enough to call you His treasure, and telling Him you didn't trust His Word? Telling Him you thought He had it wrong?

Can you imagine telling God that while you believe without a shadow of a doubt that He created the stars, you didn't believe He could have done it in a day?

Could you tell Him that while you believe He sent His Son to die on the cross for your sins, He was really off-base when it came to the whole love and marriage thing?

Here's the next question: If the man of your dreams, a modern day prince, wrote you a letter letting you know what he liked and disliked and told you he was coming to see you to choose you to be his queen, would you casually peruse it and then toss it aside, or would you read every word and evaluate whether or not you really wanted to be the queen. If you desired to be his bride, would you memorize every word and become the woman he was looking for?

Well, girls, Jesus is our prince. He is preparing His castle for us, so that He can take us home as His bride. While His only qualification is that we love Him, part of that love is choosing to love Him with even a fraction of the love He has for us. We not only need to read His love letter (the Bible); we need to take it to heart.

Part Two

Faith and Fashion



Look At Me

How Are You Advertising?

Did you know that each one of us is running a PR campaign by the way we “advertise” our bodies? For those of you wondering, PR stands for Public Relations and is the way we present ourselves to others. It’s how we want them to see us, and one way we do that is by the way we dress.

We live in a culture that encourages girls to advertise in a “sexy” way in order to attract the attention of guys. Pop stars like Beyoncé, Katy Perry, Taylor Swift, and others often encourage this type of “advertising.” It’s the “if you’ve got it, flaunt it” mentality.

In order to help us understand the impact of our PR campaign, we want to share this illustration with you. However, realize this illustration is not complete. It is just one way to get us to rethink how we advertise our bodies.

Ford Truck?

My husband and I (Shelley) used to have a Ford Ranger. It was a great vehicle, but overall, an old Ford truck is a fairly economical vehicle, right? Therefore, for this illustration, let’s say it is in the “*cheaper car market.*” There are many other brands in this “*cheaper car market.*”

Can you name some?

What about Chevy, Mazda, Dodge, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Toyota, and the list could go on and on.

You get the idea, right?

Well, because there are so many other vehicles in this “*cheaper car market*” competing for the same buyers, the Ford truck *has* to advertise. Therefore, you’ll see advertisements in the newspapers, radio ads, and TV commercials.

You might see an ad like this, “Blowout Prices on Ford Trucks at Bob’s Corner Lot. Lowest Prices of the Year - Hurry in Today!”

Just like a Ford truck *has* to advertise, you may feel the pressure to “advertise” your bodies in order to attract certain guys and compete against all the other pretty girls in the “*cheaper car market.*”

However, realize that you’ll attract a certain type of buyer by the way you advertise. In this example, we’ll call them the “*cheap car buyers.*” These “*cheap car buyers*” are those boys who are interested in looking under the hood, taking you for a test drive, and then eventually trading you in for a newer model.

Is That All There Is? The Cheap Car Market?

Sometimes, it may seem like there is only one option, but I’m here to tell you that there is another option.

Do you recognize this car name?

Lamborghini.

What is a Lamborghini? Well, depending on which model you get, it’s a car that can cost close to half a million dollars. The most expensive one actually goes for 4.5 million dollars. That’s a lot of money!

For this illustration, we’ll say it belongs in the “*classy car market*” with other cars like the Ferrari, Mercedes-Benz, and Rolls Royce.

Have you ever seen an advertisement in your local newspaper for a Lamborghini? Probably not.

Why do you think that is?

Think about it. If you have enough money to buy a Lamborghini, you probably know where to find one. Therefore, a Lamborghini doesn't need to advertise to convince you to buy it. You buy it because you have enough money and have chosen the Lamborghini over all the other cars you could have bought instead.

If you do see an advertisement for a Lamborghini, it doesn't invite you to come take it out for a spin or list a sales price. It probably highlights why the car is so valuable, and why it's set apart from all the rest. It's advertised in very select ways in very select places for a very select audience.

Just like a Lamborghini, if you are in the "*classy car market*" you won't feel the need to advertise your body to all the potential buyers. You may have to wait a while for that "*classy car buyer*," but when the right one comes along, you'll be glad you waited.

Have you ever seen how "*classy car buyers*" treat their cars? They treat them with respect, keeping them in the garage, washed and waxed, and they usually own them for a lifetime.

Which Type of Buyer Do You Want to Attract?

I think deep down most of us want to attract a guy who loves us for who we are and treats us with the utmost respect. We want to attract someone who has chosen us over all the other girls in the world and wants to be with us for a lifetime in a committed relationship called marriage.

How Will You Choose to Advertise? What Type of PR Campaign Are You Running?

It's time to look at yourself and decide how you have been advertising your body.

Are you advertising in the "*cheaper car market*," like a Ford, to attract the "*cheap car buyers*" or in the "*classy car market*," like a Lamborghini, to attract the "*classy car buyers*?"

Are you compromising your standards and allowing guys to look under the hood and take a test drive in order to be in a relationship now? Or are you waiting patiently for that "*classy car buyer*" who will cherish you and treat you with respect?

Be a Lamborghini

I encourage you to be a Lamborghini. Even if you've been advertising in the "*cheap car market*," like I did, it's never too late to change.

I've never seen a Lamborghini in a junk yard, but I've see hundreds of Ford trucks. Why? My guess is that the "*classy car buyers*" take care of the Lamborghinis while the Ford trucks are used, abused, and then discarded for the latest model. How do you want to be treated?

Let's Choose to be Treasures, Not Transportation

For the longest time in my life, I (Heather) really liked Ford trucks. I would much rather have been compared to one of them than to a fancy car like a Lamborghini. I am a small town girl, and the last thing I wanted was to be considered high-maintenance. If you can relate to me, I beg you, don't let the message here get lost in translation.

It's not about which type of vehicle you would prefer; it's about how you are advertising yourself. Part of that advertising tells guys how you want them to treat you. Do you want them to think you are a treasure or just something that will go wherever they want?

When I was in high school, about a handful of guys actually owned really nice cars. They were all super proud of them and babied them beyond belief. Worse, most of them valued their cars more than their girlfriends. They had cars they treasured and girlfriends that they used to get what they wanted. They didn't really value their girlfriends at all. If they ever had to choose between the two, they would have chosen their cars hands down.

If you advertise yourself as a cheap car that's great forgetting around, guys may take you up on it, but more than likely they won't value you. However, when you advertise yourself as one-of-a-kind, hard to get, and worth the wait, I imagine you will see completely different results.

Your Personal PR Campaign

At the beginning of this chapter, we mentioned that we are all running our own PR campaigns. There are several different ways that we publicize ourselves, and I want to take a moment to look at some of them here.

#1 – What You’re Wearing

What you are wearing is a huge part of your PR campaign because your clothes are the first thing other people see. If they see short shorts and lots of cleavage, they will make assumptions about what type of girl you are. Whether that assumption is right or wrong doesn’t matter; it’s what they see based off your clothing.

I think somewhere along the line we disconnected our clothing from ourselves. With the cultures’ mentality to show it all off, we wonder why guys don’t treat us with respect, or why other women look down on us. We don’t want people to judge us by what we are wearing. We’ve all heard the saying, “You should never judge a book by its cover.” But we should also all know that it isn’t true. We do judge others by their appearance.

If someone came to your house dressed in tattered clothing, what would your first opinion be? That they were poor, right? That opinion may be right or wrong, it doesn’t really matter, it’s just what you thought.

The question is, what does your clothing say about you? Does it say, “Look at me!” or do you *“dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning [yourself], not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God”* (1 Timothy 2:9-10)?

#2 – What You’re Doing

You can wear modest clothing and still have an immodest heart. In their book, *Project Modesty*, Kristen Clark and Bethany Baird shared a story about a time they went downtown with some of their friends. They were all dressed up, and both of them were wearing modest outfits, but they strutted down the streets relishing in the looks they were getting from guys.(49)

How you’re acting can send just as strong of a signal as what you are wearing. If you are known for making out with your boyfriend or going to wild parties, or if people see you walking around swaying your hips and flirting with guys, they will look right past your clothing straight to your heart.

We sincerely encourage you to take a moment to ask yourself, what do your actions say about you?

#3 – What You’re Saying

Another way we advertise ourselves is by the words we say. People who are in marketing do a ton of research on which words and phrases will do the best because words are important. There is power in our words, and they can tell others a lot about us.

The Bible tells us that our mouths say what our hearts are full of (Luke 6:45). In other words, our words reflect our hearts. What are your words telling others about the condition of your heart?

#4 – What You’re Posting

I like to say that social media says it all, but that’s not entirely true. However, it does play a huge part in our personal PR campaign. Did you know that oftentimes employers will look up potential employees on Facebook before they decide to hire them? They use social media to judge whether or not the applicant would be a good employee.

But employers aren’t the only ones creeping around on social media.

If you are posting sexy selfies or pictures of you in a bikini at the beach, those are pictures that others are going to look at to judge what type of person you are. I encourage you to take a look at your profile(s) and ask yourself, what does my profile say about me? If people looked at it, would they see my inner beauty?

Social media might not say it all, but it is like a mirror to our souls. We post about the things we value the most. We sometimes spew our inner-most thoughts for the whole world to see.

What Do You See?

There might be more ways we contribute to our personal PR campaigns, but those are the four main ones. They reflect not only our outer appearance, but also our hearts as well. We encourage you to use those four points as your mirror to yourself. What do you see when you look in your PR mirror?

Are you campaigning yourself the way you really want to, or do you need to make some changes?



God's Fashion Tip

Evaluating How We Think about Fashion

Many people give out their advice or the latest fashion tips, helping you “dress to impress.” I (Shelley) have to admit that for most of my life I have enjoyed shopping for new clothes and putting cute outfits together. For those of us who enjoy shopping, it is fun, isn't it? The rush of buying something new and having the satisfaction of “creating the look” is a high for many of us.

Some of you are like me in that you tend to trust in your beauty (Ezekiel 16:15). It makes you feel good to be the best dressed in the room. But for others, you avoid the mall like the plague and are content with the clothes in your closet.

God's Fashion Tip

Have you ever heard the saying, WWJD - “What Would Jesus Do?” It became a popular slogan years ago, and it really packs a powerful message. But, have you ever thought of WWJD as “What Wouldn't Jesus Do?”

Just as you might not eat a certain type of food because you know it will make you sick or give you heartburn, there are certain fashion choices that can lead to “spiritual heartburn.” There are certain things Jesus asks us to avoid because He knows the heartache they will bring. I know this from personal experience.

The good news is that we are not without God's help when it comes to our fashion and clothing choices. 2 Peter 1:3 says, “*His divine power has given us everything*”

we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” Notice it says *everything*. It doesn’t say “except for this latest generation—they really have me stumped in this area of fashion.”

We believe we can apply God’s Word and find the answers we need for *everything*, even our clothing and fashion choices. Some of you may be tuning me out right now but stick with me so you can see for yourself.

Let’s think about this question for a moment—what influences you the most in regards to the clothes you buy and wear?

It could be a number of things:

- ~ Your friends or peers
- ~ The media (TV, magazines, movies, social media, etc.)
- ~ Your parents
- ~ Your boyfriend (or husband if you are married)
- ~ God

In what order would you rate those influences in your life?

Confession Time

Well, this is confession time for me. I have to admit that there was a time in my life when I was primarily influenced in my clothing choices by the media. I spent a lot of time watching shows like “What Not to Wear,” “How Do I Look?” “Extreme Makeover,” and so forth. I also scanned the latest magazines any chance I could get to gain a few more fashion tips.

As I began to become *saturated* by the influence of media in the area of fashion, my clothing style gradually began to change. Even though I would never have admitted it, what I was trying to achieve by the way I dressed was the “sexy look” that is advertised everywhere. I was changing my PR campaign and the way I advertised myself. In doing so, I slowly began to compromise how I dressed in order to get the attention I wanted and to feel good about myself.

I was a Christian and had been a Christian for years, so Satan knew he couldn’t get me to immediately start to dress like Britney Spears and many of the pop idols today, but if the change was gradual, he knew it would be easier for me to fall for it. And I did.

That's how Satan, often works. He plays us like a video game, trying to win one level at a time. Once he wins the first level, then he moves on to the second and so forth. Compromising in the way you dress can be a slippery slope that will eventually impact your actions, such as the way you flirt with guys and your sexual choices.

For me, my clothes gradually became tighter, showing off my figure, and the necklines became lower. I was not oblivious; I knew the impact my clothing choices were having. I could tell you exactly which outfits in my closet would get me the most attention from the guys I was around. Deep down I knew, and I imagine you do too.

I Came to My Senses

I'm so thankful that God got my attention. It's as if, like the prodigal son (Luke 15:17), I came to my senses and woke up to the reality of my poor clothing choices as just one outward sign of my slowly dying spiritual life.

At that time, I read a book called *Every Woman's Battle* by Shannon Etheridge and felt like she was writing the book about me. I looked over my shoulder wondering if she had been peeking inside my life as she was penning her book.

For myself and many girls and women today, there is a reason we dress the way we do: we have a God given desire to look beautiful, and that is a *good* thing. God created us beautiful, and His creation wasn't complete until He created woman. Think about that the next time you see a beautiful sunset or mountain range. God's creation wasn't complete without you!!

Have you noticed that there is power in our beauty? God created it to be this way. In her book, *Secret Keeper*, Dannah Gresh said it this way, "Modesty is the source of this delicate yet formidable power, making it a power in and of itself. It's delicate because it can be so innocently given away without your even knowing it. It's formidable—or difficult to deal with or control—because once you've mastered it, no man will be given access to the full secrets behind your allure until you so desire." (50)

I'm sure you've noticed the many differences between how guys and girls respond to relationships. A multitude of books have been written about the differences between guys and girls. But to summarize, guys are primarily visual and attracted

to what they see, while girls are primarily emotional and long to be deeply loved and accepted.

So, how do these differences relate to God's advice about our fashion choices?

Well, I realized that my PR campaign had changed, and if I continued advertising in this same way, I would eventually make choices I would regret. I would end up making choices that would hurt both God and my husband.

Although I had been a Christian for a long time, no one really taught me God's principles in this area, so I began to ask God for His help in my clothing choices and here is some of the advice I was given.

#1 - I Was Drinking from a Broken Cup

This is the image I got regarding my life:

I was holding a cup and trying to fill it up each day with water. I would first go to my husband and when he showed me love or affirmation, he poured a little water into my cup. Then, I would be at work, and if my boss was pleased with my work, he put a little water in my cup as well. When I went shopping, the thrill of getting a bargain and something new also put some water in my cup. Later, when I talked to my family and friends on the phone, they filled up my cup some too.

But there was a problem.

The "water" in my cup didn't satisfy. I had to keep going back for more and more to quench my thirst, the emptiness inside, because I was drinking from a broken cup.

Have you ever felt this way? For you, it could be that food, drugs, shopping, sex, flirting, talking or texting on your cell phone, or a number of other things temporarily fill your cup. It's easy for these things to become addictions because we have to keep going back to them again and again in order to feel good.

In Jeremiah 2:13, God describes what happened to me. *"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."* I had forsaken God, my source of living water that would completely satisfy me, and had settled for my broken cistern or what I call my broken cup.

Jeremiah 17:5-8 contrasts living a life trusting in yourself or human strength versus trusting in God. *“This is what the Lord says: Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”*

My first step, like the woman at the well in John 4, was to exchange my broken cup for God’s living water. When I made this exchange, it was as if instead of drinking a drop here or there, I was now drinking out of a fire hydrant hose with more water than I could ever imagine!

#2 - I Realized I was Walking as a “Candle Among Gunpowder”

Richard Baxter once said, “You must not lay a stumbling block in their way, nor blow up the fire of their lust... You must walk among sinful persons, as you could do with a candle among straw or gunpowder, or else you may see the flame which you did not foresee, when it is too late to quench.” That quote is so powerful if you really let the imagery sink in.

I became very convicted when I read Jesus’ words in Luke 17:1-3 and thought about how they relate to how I dress—possibly creating lust in guys. It says, *“Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for (her) to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around (her) neck than for (her) to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves.”*

Did you know that Jesus said in Matthew 5:28 that, *“Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart”*?

Now I’m not saying the blame goes only to the girls here. The guys also have a responsibility for their thought lives, but God showed me that I do have a responsibility to dress in a way that is honoring to God and not tempting guys to lust.

We will give you some general tips in the next chapter, but there are no set modesty rules. Each of us needs to talk with God about our clothing choices and decide what standards He is asking us to live by.

“Imagine how fulfilling it will be if you save it all... every moment of passion, every bared curve, every suggestive glance! Imagine the powerful “intoxication” you’ll create for the man of your dreams if you keep the deepest secrets of your beauty just for him.”

~ Dannah Gresh([51](#))

#3 - I Was Stealing What Belonged to Someone Else

Would you go to a girlfriend’s house and steal her favorite CD, outfit, or even her dog? Most of us would never even think of doing such a thing. I would never call myself a thief, but I was. I was stealing guys’ emotional and sexual energies that belonged only to their wives or future wives.

I get very angry when I think of other girls “taking” my husband’s emotional and sexual energy that doesn’t belong to them; it belongs to me. Then, I end up with the leftovers! Yet I was guilty of taking other men’s emotional and sexual energy by the way I dressed and interacted with them.

Your future husband is out there somewhere right now. How do you want the girls around him to treat him? Do you want them to dress and act in ways that tempt him to lust and then possibly act on that lust? It’s something for each of us to consider.

#4 - Time and Money Spent Achieving “The Look”

How long would you estimate it takes you to get ready in the mornings? On average, women spend 2.5 years of their life washing, styling, cutting, coloring, crimping, and straightening their hair at home or in the salon. And that’s just the time spent on our hair!

A 2010 survey found that the average woman spends \$13,000 on makeup in her lifetime, and an average of 330 hours applying it.[\(52\)](#) I honestly think that number is really low, but still, that’s just time and money spent on makeup.

What about the time you spend shopping? I used to spend hours and hours every week shopping for the latest fashions at bargain prices. I didn’t spend a ton of

money, but I was spending a lot of my time, yet I would say that I didn't have time for God.

Those are the four things that really helped me change my perspective on what I wear. Maybe they can help you, too. You can also check out some of the differences between inner beauty and outer beauty on the next page. Do any of them surprise you?

Outer Beauty vs. Inner Beauty

Outer Beauty

- ~ Costs me time to get ready in the morning and to go shopping.
- ~ Costs me money for makeup, clothes, etc.
- ~ Fades with time.
- ~ Is common; fairly easy to obtain.
- ~ Puts the focus is on myself—selfish.
- ~ May cause others to envy me and feel inferior.
- ~ Is vanity, and vanity is a sin, as are pride, greed, seduction, and materialism.
- ~ Makes it easy to trust in my beauty instead of God (Ezekiel 16:13-15).
- ~ Draws the attention of men and feeds into my other struggles.
- ~ Never satisfies (broken cup) “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again” (John 4:13-14).

Inner Beauty

- ~ Costs me time to spend with God.
- ~ Costs nothing financially but will possibly cost me the approval of the world.
- ~ Is unfading.
- ~ Is rare. Difficult to obtain in that you have to face the pain in your life and receive healing.
- ~ Shifts the focus to God.
- ~ Draws others to me.
- ~ Has great worth in God’s sight.
- ~ Completely satisfies, drink the living water Jesus gives, and you will never thirst. A spring of water welling up to eternal life.



Fashion Tips

My Edition of “What Not to Wear”

Is it possible to dress trendy without dressing trashy? To be modern, yet modest?

Yes!!

As God began convicting my heart, I (Shelley) decided to go through my closet. I'm sorry to say that some of my favorite outfits had to go. Throwing them out was a decision between me and God. No one was forcing me to get rid of anything; I just knew in my heart that I needed to.

Boy, did I ever have a big stack of clothes to get rid of! Anything I wasn't sure about, I modeled for my husband and had him make the final verdict, after all, he knows how guys think.

I needed to start thinking differently when I was shopping for clothes. I soon found a “secret weapon” to help make today's trendy clothes acceptable for those of us walking with God and in purity.

Guess what it is?

The Secret Weapon...

What is the secret weapon? A simple tank top.

How can this item of clothing be used as your secret weapon to transform your trendy clothes? It can be worn underneath your other cute shirts that might not be modest on their own. Here are a few examples of when I use mine:

- ~ When my shirt is too low in front
- ~ When my shirt raises up and shows my midriff when I lift my arms
- ~ When my button up shirt gaps and shows my bra
- ~ When my waist line is lower than the bottom of my shirt
- ~ When my shirt is sheer or so thin my bra shows through

I have really used this “secret weapon” a lot. I’ve reached the point where I need to buy more tank tops because it seems like the one I want to wear is always in the laundry. They come in different colors, but the one I use the most is the white one. It may take a little hunting to find the ones that will work best (not too low in the front, the right colors, etc.) but it’s been worth it for me!

Another way you can layer is by adding a vest, button up shirt, or sweater over the top of another shirt that isn’t quite modest. Maybe there is a gap in the buttons of your button up shirt; putting a vest on top can hide that. If you have a spaghetti strap tank top or another shirt you don’t think is really modest on its own, you can pull on a button up or open front shirt on top to make the outfit more modest.

My Solution for Tight Pants?

I used to think the only thing I needed to be concerned about regarding *the waist down* was wearing skirts or shorts that were too short. Then I became convicted that when I was buying pants, I was concerned with how “cute” my butt looked in them.

I started to notice that if I was standing behind a group of people, and the girls were wearing tight pants, my eyes automatically went to their butts. I began to wonder if that is what happened to other people when they looked at me from behind. I came to the conclusion that they did and decided it was in my best interests to avoid wearing jeans or pants that are too tight or form fitting.

Why? It was one more decision I was making to honor God with my body.

My solution for tight pants? Cute skirts, long shirts, long sweaters, and pants that aren't as tight.

A Few More Modesty Tips

These are only tips and not rules, but they can get you started in the right direction. Let's do a quick modesty check from head to toe.

Is the neckline of my shirt too low? I try to make sure I can put my palm between the top of my bra and the top of the neckline on my shirt. Another way to do it is put your hand flat on your chest right under your neck and make sure your shirt meets your palm.

Modesty Tip: Wear a tank top underneath your shirt that comes up higher.

Is my shirt too loose? While it may sound silly, if your shirt is too loose, it can show more than you mean to when you lean forward.

Modesty Tip: Use double sided tape to hold your neckline in place or wear a tighter tank top underneath your shirt.

Are my bra straps showing?

Modesty Tip: Pin your straps in place or layer a shirt over the top or even underneath the one you're wearing.

Is my shirt too tight?

Modesty Tip: Layer another shirt or jacket over top. Sometimes, I buy a bigger size than normal.

Does my belly show when I lift my hands overhead? Or can you see my underwear when I lean over?

Modesty Tip: Wear a tank top underneath your shirt that you can tuck in or leave out for a layered look.

Are my pants or skirts too tight? Does my panty line show through?

Modesty Tip: Wear a longer shirt untucked that covers your hips or wear looser pants and skirts.

Is my skirt or shorts too short? Note: sit down and look in front of a mirror to check.

Modesty Tip: Wear board shorts, Capris, or long skirts. You can also layer by adding a pair of leggings underneath.

Those are just a few ideas that work for us, but you may have your own creative ways of coming up with modest, yet trendy outfits. One thing, however, should be clear...

There Are No Set “Modesty Rules”

We want to make sure you understand that we are not trying to shove “101 modesty rules” down your throat. We realize that every girl’s body is different and we may look differently in the same clothes; ergo, what applies to me, may not apply to you. Plus, modesty comes from the heart. You have to decide for yourself what your modesty standards will be; they are between you and God.

Now, I won’t lie to you. It does take me longer to find trendy clothes that fit my standards, but it’s not impossible. Girls, we don’t have to dress in big, ugly, baggy clothes in order to “*honor God with our bodies*” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

In *Project Modesty*, Kristen Clark and Bethany Baird, who are both co-authors and sisters, wrote that when they started dressing modestly they felt “more real, beautiful, and true to who (they were) than ever before.”(53) In fact, their younger sister, Rebekah, started a website with the sole goal “to inspire girls to dress modestly while looking totally adorable in the process.”(54) You can check it out for some modest, trendy fashion examples at HelloModesty.com.

Before we continue our look at modesty from a different angle in the next chapter, we want to leave you with words from C.J. Mahaney, who said, “Any biblical discussion of modesty begins by addressing the heart, not the hemline.”(55) And that really is the bottom line. If you don’t have an understanding of why dressing modestly is important, it really won’t matter how you actually dress, you will still have an immodest heart. Your immodesty will seep out regardless of what you’re wearing.

Modesty is part of your true beauty that shines from the inside out, and it is reflected in your clothing. And just like beauty, true modesty is more than skin deep.

How do you dress in a way that honors God? Share your fashion tips and get more ideas at <http://Fashion.TrueBeautyBook.com>



Beach Babes

The Swimsuit Dilemma

Have you found it difficult to find modest swimwear? Have you even looked? There is a huge debate about whether or not it's okay for us to wear bikinis as Christian women. But really, only one opinion should matter, and that's God's.

I (Shelley) have to admit that as God began to get a hold of my heart in the area of fashion and modesty, I began to think differently. As I began to think differently, I began to question things I had always just accepted as "normal." One of the things I began to question was our typical American swimsuit.

Beginning to Question My Swimsuit Standards

Questions like these began to enter my mind:

What is the history of swimsuits? Have we always worn revealing suits like we do today, or did women previously wear modest swimwear?

Why am I willing to lower my standards regarding modesty for swimwear when I have willingly made changes in the rest of my wardrobe?

What does God think of my choice of swimwear? Am I pleasing Him in this area?

These are not easy questions with easy answers. To be honest, at first, I tried to ignore the issue of modest swimwear. I don't swim very often, so I just didn't take the time to decide how I would handle it.

Until I got this email...

Hi Shelley!

I am a new reader of your site, and I have to say that it is wonderful! It has helped me so much with my relationship with God and my family. My parents have never stressed the importance of being modest and don't really have a close relationship with God, so you (unknowingly) have been helping me along.

I'm just 14 years old and in need of help. Personally, I don't really have anyone to go to with this question... my mother doesn't understand how I'm feeling no matter how I phrase it. I'm struggling with modesty. With a school focused on looking "hott" when we're JUST 14, there's a lot of pressure.

With bathing suit season coming up and skimpy, less-than-lingerie bikinis EVERYWHERE, I'm afraid I may cave into the temptation and buy one.

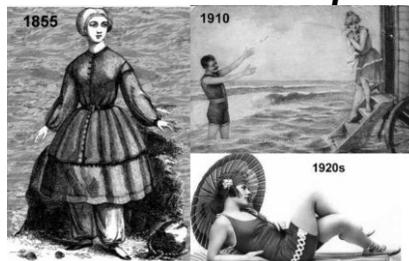
What's your view on modest swimwear? Bikinis? Halters? One pieces?

I realized when I received this email it was finally time to tackle this difficult question: What would be my stand on modest swimwear? I began to pray and ask God for His wisdom because I knew I didn't have the answers on my own.

The History of Swimwear

As I began researching the history of swimwear, I found it interesting that it wasn't until the 1920's that women began wearing the type of swimsuit that we now wear today. At that time, it was still strictly a one-piece bathing suit. It wasn't until 1946 that the bikini was "re-invented" by two Frenchmen, Jacques Heim and Louis Reard. Today, most women wear either a one piece, a tankini, or a bikini... some more revealing than others.

Check out a few pictures of swimwear from the past...



So, my first question was answered. Have we always worn revealing suits like we do today? No. Women used to wear more modest swimwear. It has just been in the last 60 years that bikinis were “re-invented.”

My Double Standards, Feeling Like a Hypocrite

The more I thought about my swimsuit choices, the more I began to feel like a hypocrite. Why, you ask? Well, God had convicted me of my fashion choices, and I was starting to dress differently. You see, I decided that I could dress trendy and cute as long as I didn’t compromise my modesty standards, but it seemed like my swimsuit choices broke all my modesty standards.

I started thinking. There’s no way I would walk around on the street among strangers in my bra and underwear, so why would I feel comfortable at the beach in a bikini, which is very similar to a bra and underwear, walking among strangers?

I knew I wouldn’t choose to wear a really tight tank top and underwear to a friend’s house to hang out, so why do I feel okay about wearing my tankini when hanging out by the pool?

I started to realize that I would have to change my swimsuit choices, but to be honest, I didn’t want to. It didn’t seem like anyone else, even other Christians, were willing to stand out and be different. It seemed like everyone I knew gave in to the culture and wore the typical swimsuit. It seemed like the only “modest” swimwear choice was a one piece or a tankini that wasn’t too low cut on the top or cut too high on the bottom.

Was that really the only modest swimwear choice? Or was I just afraid of standing out and being different? I have to be honest, I was afraid to be different. Choosing to please people rather than God is something I’ve struggled with my whole life. Wanting to fit in and be accepted by people and not “rock the boat” was easier, or so it seemed.

What Does God Think of My Choice of Swimwear? Am I Pleasing Him in This Area?

I had to make a decision. Would I choose to please people or choose to please God? What does God think of my current swimwear choices?

I have to admit that there is not a verse in the Bible that mentions the words swimsuit, bathing suit, modest swimwear, or bikini. However, God does give us some of His thoughts about modesty and sexuality.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. **Therefore, honor God with your body.**”*

Ephesians 5:3 says, *“But among you **there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.**”*

Matthew 5:28 says, *“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

Luke 17:1-3 says, *“Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, **but woe to that person through whom they come.** It would be better for (her) to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around (her) neck than for (her) to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves.”*

God asks us to honor Him with our bodies. For me, I began to realize that I was not honoring God with my body in my swimsuit choices. Instead, I was compromising my standards and flaunting my beauty before others, possibly causing others to sin by lusting after my body.

Decision Time Regarding Modest Swimwear

I now felt convicted that I didn’t want to continue wearing the same tankini that I had worn for the last couple of years, even though it is considered fairly modest swimwear according to what is available these days. So, if I’m not going to wear the tankini, what am I going to wear?

I started searching online for modest swimsuits to see what was out there. I was pretty disappointed because there was really not much available. I did find a few options, but for the most part, I would have to compromise my standards of fashion in order to be modest. I wondered if it was really possible to find modest swimwear that would still be trendy and cute. So my search began.

A Look at Surfers Attire... Board Shorts and Rash Guards

Several of the websites I visited discussed the option of wearing board shorts and rash guard shirts as a modest alternative to the traditional swimsuit. Women surfers usually wear this type of outfit to protect their skin from the sun and to be more functional, so their swimsuits don't fall off as they are fighting the waves.

Hmm. I thought if surfers wear something like this, why not me? I didn't think it would be a perfect solution for modest swimwear, but it could possibly work.

My First Attempt at a Modest Swimsuit

First, I looked up board shorts and rash guards online. I'll warn you that they tend to be expensive, but if you look on eBay or Amazon, you may run across some that could work for you.

My next stop was the mall. I went a couple weeks before summer clothes were released and found nothing anywhere that would work for me.

I waited a couple weeks and then found a cute pair of board shorts at Walmart for under \$15. I thought that was a pretty good deal. I then looked for a shirt I could wear to match the shorts. I figured I would be wearing a sports bra underneath it, but I wanted something made out of material that would dry fast.

I found a shirt at Kohl's on sale that was 90% nylon and 10% spandex, the same materials you'll find in a typical swimsuit. I decided to wear a tight fitting tank top underneath (80% nylon, 20% spandex) and found the tank top in the lingerie section because it's a type of shape wear that you can wear under clothes. Since my shirt was white, I needed to make sure that my sports bra didn't show through. Also, if the shirt comes up while I'm swimming, it won't show anything since I have the other tank top underneath. All in all, I spent about \$40 for this option.



Heather was able to find a rash guard at Walmart in the kid's section that fit her, and wore it over a bikini top with board shorts. She bought everything at the end of the summer, so it was all on sale. There are also places online that sell modest swimwear, but most of them tend to be on the expensive side.

Let's Get Creative

Wearing board shorts and a shirt or rash guard is not the only modest swimwear option, but it's the option we have chosen for ourselves for right now. We actually both came to that option on our own at different times. What about you, though? What other ways can you think of to help make your swimsuit choices pleasing to God and honor Him with your body?

- ~ What about wearing a tankini with a swim skirt overtop and a swim skirt or swim shorts?
- ~ Maybe you know someone who sews or you can sew yourself and can design your own modest swimsuits!
- ~ What if you take what you already have and modify it to be more modest?

We think the most important part is to realize you do have options. Realize that you're not alone in this dilemma and that many other girls struggle to find an option for modest swimwear.

— Share Your Thoughts —

What Do You Think About Modest Swimwear?

Swimwear tends to be a controversial topic, even among Christians. What do you think? Are you comfortable wearing a bikini? What are some ways you think we can address this issue? Let us know what you think at

<http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>



True Beauty Tips

Let Your Inner Beauty Shine!

Because beauty is such an important topic for us girls, I (Shelley) want to share an inner beauty tip with you and give you the chance to share your inner beauty with others.

Most of the time, when I think of beauty, I automatically think of someone's outer beauty. How they dress, what their hair looks like, what type of makeup they wear, etc. I have to admit that inner beauty is thought about and talked about a lot less, at least for me.

I have to make a conscious effort to focus on my inner beauty. It's a lot easier for me to look in the mirror and know that I need to wash my hair than it is to look inside myself and see where I need to grow emotionally or spiritually.

However, when I take the time to do so and then offer forgiveness to someone or connect with God, it shows! I am more fun to be around and have more joy that naturally shines through my personality.

I also believe that your inner beauty can shine through the abilities, gifts, and talents God has given you.

What gifts or talents do you have? Are you a writer? Maybe you write in a journal or write poetry. Are you an artist? Maybe you paint, draw, sculpt, design graphics, etc. Are you a musician? Maybe you write lyrics or compose songs? Maybe you

love to sing or play an instrument. There are countless ways that your inner beauty and the creativity God has given you can shine through.

This is my inner beauty tip: let your inner beauty shine through by sharing your creativity with others. The sky's the limit. Don't hide your inner beauty... let it shine!!

Matthew 5:14-16 says, *“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, **let your light shine before men**, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

— Share Your Thoughts —

What About You?

Do you have a gift or talent to share that displays your inner beauty? It can be anything from a journal entry to a picture of your artwork to a video of a song you performed (or wrote) or a great photo you took.

Let's share and display the inner beauty God has given us! Share your inner beauty on social media with the hashtag #myinnerbeauty or share on our website at <http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>

Part Three

Sex and Dating



Flirting

Is It Just Innocent Fun?

Most girls tend to be romantics. We love when a guy goes out of his way to set up the perfect date. The flowers. The candlelight. Enjoying quality time together. His voice telling us how beautiful we look. The music.

I (Shelley) remember one particular date my husband set up for me on Valentine's Day. He had a trail of paper hearts leading to the basement where he had a table set up for a candlelight dinner. He doesn't cook, so it meant a lot to me that he cooked the entire meal himself. Plus, he made my favorite dessert - cheesecake!

I think I fell a little harder for him that night because I knew he cared enough to put the time into planning our time together. Flirting goes hand in hand with romance, and it's really going to be the focus of this chapter.

Why Do We Flirt?

In chapter 11, we talked about how we act as part of our personal PR campaigns. We also think it is important to recognize why we flirt. Our words and actions tell other people something about us, so what does flirting say about us? Have you ever thought about that before?

Before I (Heather) married, I would have said that I flirted with guys for one of two reasons. Either I wanted their attention because I liked them, or I was just goofing off or having fun. Would you agree with that?

Well, now that I'm married, I have a totally different take on flirting. I would never dream of flirting with anyone other than my husband, and I wouldn't want him flirting with anyone other than me. It's not that I'm jealous by nature, it's that flirting is something I want to be special between us, and it's a way we show our desire for one another.

I realize that you probably aren't married, but think about your parents. Would you like it if your mom started flirting with your teachers, the pastor at your church, or some random guy? Would you view it as just innocent fun? Probably not. You might have had thoughts like "Ewww, gross!" just run through your head. Or maybe your mom does that already, and it makes you uncomfortable or embarrassed.

That leads me to ask, if flirting is all innocent fun when we are young and single, why is it different when we are married or older? And of course, our go-to place to find the answer is always the Bible.

So the next question we have to ask is this:

What Does God's Word Say About Flirting?

I (Shelley) looked this up in my concordance in my Bible and found "flirting" once. Isaiah 3:16 talks about women "*flirting with their eyes.*" However, in Song of Songs, we read an important principle we can apply to flirting and dating. This principle is repeated three times in Song of Songs (2:7, 3:5, and 8:4).

In the Bible, anytime something is repeated, it usually means we should pay attention because it is something pretty important. Let's take a look at those verses:

"Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field; Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires."

Song of Songs is a love story. If you didn't realize romance is in the Bible, it is! And we are given some good advice... "*Do not awaken or arouse love until it so desires.*"

Think of it this way, your sexuality is a gift to be enjoyed with one person in a committed relationship called marriage. Until that time, your sexuality is "asleep."

However, it is possible to “arouse” your sexuality earlier than marriage or outside of marriage, and once it’s aroused or awakened, it’s really hard to convince your sexuality to go back to sleep. Some of us know this claim is true from personal experience.

Once your sexuality is wide awake, it’s hard to turn it off. It’s like the proverbial slippery slope where one thing leads to another. James 1:13-15 says, *“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”*

Did you see how it all started with the temptation that then led to desire that then to sin and finally to death? When we give in to sexual immorality, it will eventually lead to spiritual death. Another way to think about it is, once you get on a roller-coaster, it’s hard to get back off before the ride comes to a stop at its final destination.

How Do We Arouse or Awaken Our Sexuality?

Some of us do arouse our sexuality while we are innocently flirting and having fun. We think it’s really no big deal. But then, one thing does lead to another, the hormones increase, and before we know it, we’ve done something we regret.

It’s like a frog in the pot of water. If the water is boiling, the frog will immediately jump right back out and avoid its death. However, if you start with cold water and then gradually heat it up, the frog won’t realize what’s happening and will end up dying a slow death.

The Same Thing Can Happen to Us with Sexual Temptation.

Hayley DiMarco addresses the sexual side of flirting in her book, *Technical Virgin, How Far is Too Far.*(56) She talks about back rubs and tickle fights as innocent flirting that can very easily arouse or awaken the sexual desires within us that lead us to compromising sexually. I think she has a good point. If you don’t think back rubs and tickle fights are sexual she says to ask your boyfriend these questions:

***“Does he give his 82-year-old grandma back rubs?
Does he have tickle fights with his buddies?”(57)***

Most likely his answer will be “no” because they are both sexual in nature. Other things Hayley warns us to avoid are napping together and skin on skin contact. All of these activities put us in positions to start wanting more or even thinking about sex.

Jesus said it isn't only our actions on sin that counted, but also our thoughts. He's very clear about this. In Matthew 5:27-28, He says, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* That's serious!

What do you think?

Is Your Flirting Arousing and Awakening Something Within You?

Is flirting arousing something that is leading you down a sexual path where you never intended to go? It's never too late to put your sexuality back to sleep until God brings that one person into your life for marriage. It may be difficult, but God has the power to overcome any stronghold in our lives.

Have you already compromised sexually?

Remember there is forgiveness for you in God if you'll take it, which we will talk more about in Chapter 25. Just know that the Bible says flirting is dangerous. Even if you haven't gone too far physically, it's still possible you are causing damage to yourself or others. Keep reading to find out more...



The Dating Scene

To Date or Not To Date?

We have to admit that we are not dating or relationship experts, but when we look back on our dating habits before getting married, we both will admit that we have many regrets. Why? Well, let me (Shelley) tell you a little more of my story and what I learned.

How it All Began

I grew up in a Christian home. I learned that I should “save sex for marriage” and that I should “date only Christian guys.” However, what I was taught about dating was very limited, and my main influences came from my friends and the media. Early on, I ended up adapting a self-centered approach to romance and dating.

My parents told me I wasn’t allowed to date until I was 16. For some reason, 16 tends to be the magical age when we are suddenly ready and mature enough to date. However, during my sophomore year, a senior guy started pursuing me, and I convinced my parents to allow me to start dating earlier, about six months before I turned 16.

I enjoyed the attention my boyfriend gave me. In a selfish way, I saw my relationship with him as a way to feel good about myself. He made me feel special, he listened to me, and I felt loved by him. I felt good about the fact that he had chosen me over all the other girls in the school to be his girlfriend.

Because he had a car, dating him opened up a whole new world of independence for me. We spent a lot of time together that year. I remember one night early on in our relationship; he pressured me to have sex with him. I was very strong in my conviction that I would save sex for marriage and said, “No.” He said he would respect that boundary and he kept his word.

We never had sexual intercourse. However, even though we didn’t cross the line and have intercourse, we went very close to the edge, a place I have come to regret. I ended up breaking up with my boyfriend when he went away to college that next year, but he took a piece of my heart with him.

Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places

They say hindsight is 20/20. Looking back on my dating experiences, I realize some of my life circumstances set the stage for me to see guys in a distorted way, in a selfish way for what I could get out of the relationship.

Unlike some, I had a dad who was present in my life. He came to all my games and activities and was a good financial provider for our family. However, his job as the pastor of our church often took much of his time and emotional energy.

Although he was a good provider in many ways, he didn’t connect with me on a deep, emotional level. He left that to my mom. He admits that he didn’t truly know how to express his feelings until I was an adult. As a result, in some ways, I left childhood feeling emotionally neglected by my dad. I *knew* he loved me, but deep down I still didn’t *feel* loved by him. Instead, I felt an emptiness inside, a longing to be loved.

Then, just as I was getting interested in boys, a popular guy in our school used me for what he wanted sexually and then never talked to me again. I felt rejected and hurt. As an adult, I realize that he stole something very precious from me... my innocence.

Using Guys to Feel Good About Myself

Through this experience, my eyes were opened to realize the power I held as a female to influence guys, and I began to use this power to my advantage. I realized that I could gain guys’ attention by how I dressed and interacted with them. Even though I wasn’t having sex with these guys, I still knew how to allure them with my eyes, my smile, and my body.

Some of my friends would joke with me in college that I knew how to “attract all the guys.” I now regret those years of self-centered relationships. I am ashamed to say that I attracted the guys because I had learned how to be a “flirt.” Flirting was something I had control over, and I used to feel good about myself.

Isaiah 3:16 (AMP) explains the concept pretty well: “*The daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks and with **undisciplined (flirtatious and alluring) eyes.***”

Therefore, since I had this longing to be loved and knew how to attract a guy’s attention, I saw guys as one way to fill the emptiness I felt on the inside.

It was purely selfish.

I wasn’t thinking of their best interests, only mine. Just like many other girls, I played the games and broke many hearts.

Even after I committed my life to Christ, I still didn’t fully surrender this area of romance and dating to Him. Because of this, I carried some of those habits I had developed into marriage. Not good! God finally got my attention after some really hard years and many mistakes that almost costing me my marriage.

Jesus Rescued Me

I am thankful to say that Jesus rescued me from the path of destruction I was headed down. You see, I was living a self-centered life. Instead of allowing God to help me forgive those who hurt me, heal my past hurts, and fill me completely with His love, I was trying to do things my own way in this area of relating to guys.

I realized that I needed to surrender this area of my life and allow God to change my thoughts and my actions. He began to transform me and the way I interacted with guys. He began to convict me in many areas, including modesty and flirting, and began to change me from the inside out. Instead of living for myself and what makes me feel good, I am now a new creation and aim to live for Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Paul writes, “*For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live **should no longer live for themselves but for him** who died for them and was raised again.*” And in verse 17 he said, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*”

Jesus promises to fill me completely with His love. Thus, I don't need to go searching for that love in relationships with guys.

Ephesians 3:16-19 says, *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he (Jesus) may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, **to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**”* The amplified version says to be *“flooded with God Himself.”*

Where Does God Stand on Dating and Intimacy?

God's standard for us is intimacy within a committed relationship called marriage.

As Joshua Harris wrote in his book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, “An intimate relationship is a beautiful experience that God wants us to enjoy. After all, He stated that it wasn't good for man to be alone and created the woman to perfectly complement him and help him (Genesis 2:18). But God has made the fulfillment of intimacy a by-product of commitment based love. If we want to experience the goodness of His plan, we need to reconnect the pursuit of intimacy with the pursuit of commitment. This is what I call the Little Relationship Principle: *The joy of intimacy is the reward of commitment.*”([58](#))

Is He “The One”?

You may think that because you are so in love that it's okay to open your heart completely. You think he's the one, so why wait? Right? Statistics show that you will most likely not be marrying your high school boyfriend. Which means that it is likely you will break up, and if you do marry him, statistics show that 51% of teen marriages end in divorce before the age of 24 (US Bureau of Statistics).

The bottom line? You will most likely not marry the guy you are dating or have a crush on.

The Self-Centered Dating Game

How about you? Are you caught up in this self-centered dating game? I know I was. Our culture encourages a string of short term relationships and looking for intimacy without commitment.

What most of us don't realize is that the dating game has lasting consequences; it sets us up to continue in this cycle even after we're married. We learn how to have one short term relationship after another while dating. Therefore, when things get tough in marriage, we may be more willing to settle for divorce instead of staying committed to our spouses, "for better or worse." That's where Heather's story comes in.

What Does True Love Look Like?

I (Heather) remember having crushes on guys my entire life. I had my first boyfriend before I was even in kindergarten. I don't remember the actual relationship, but I have pictures of us together, and I used to hear the story of how we kissed on the Head Start bus. Everyone thought it was cute, but it had a long lasting effect.

I can't remember a time when I didn't think I was in love with one boy or another. I was either in a relationship or crushing hard on someone. And every single time, I swore it was true love.

However, there was a serious problem.

In an earlier chapter, I shared that my parents were divorced, and my stepfather wasn't really a good dad either. Because of these things, I really didn't have the slightest clue what true love looked like. Based on what I saw in the movies, I assumed it was a feeling, that you could just look at someone and feel whether or not he was the one for you. If he didn't feel the same way, you just had to wait until that moment when it clicked for him too. (I watched a *lot* of romance movies.)

Over time, I have learned that love isn't primarily a feeling, but a choice. We can convince ourselves to feel almost anything emotionally. It's why so many of us end up with celebrity crushes, and that's what they are, crushes. We know we have never met them, so we don't truly love them. We get that. But when we have a crush on our next door neighbor, we assume it must be true love.

Our crush is based solely on us and our feelings. Our wants and desires. I wish I would have learned early on that that's not what love is about at all. Real love is about commitment. It's a choice to love even when the feelings aren't there.

Fun vs Forever

Because of my warped view of love, I spent most of my years as a young woman chasing feelings. I even graduated high school a year early and married when I was 17. You might think that's your dream come true and super romantic, but I am one of those statistics Shelley mentioned. My marriage didn't last. My husband left me less than two years after we were married, and most of those two years were a struggle.

Our marriage was based on feelings. For both of us. We understood that marriage was a commitment, and we swore it would be forever, but it was really hard to transition from crush to commitment, especially when you think every crush you have is going to turn out to be "the one." It's hard to flip the switch in your mind from going to one relationship to another to staying with one person for the rest of your life.

I have come to think of it as the difference between fun and forever. If you are dating guys just for fun, it's harder to get into the forever mindset, especially when forever isn't fun anymore. I wish I would have known that before I married at 17, but it's something I had to learn the hard way. However, when I met my current husband, we entered our relationship with a completely different mentality. We have been married for almost ten years now, and while we still have our struggles, I have no doubts our marriage will last forever.

Time to Kiss Dating Good-Bye?

To stop dating altogether might sound radical to you, but we want to encourage you to consider avoiding romantic, one-on-one relationships until marriage. Not that you won't have any relationships, but only *appropriate* friendships with guys. Don't give too much of your heart or ask for their exclusive affections unless you are ready to consider marriage. Some might call this concept courtship.

If you do decide to date like we did, it can be easy to take your focus off of God and use that guy to meet your short term needs, not thinking about the long term effects for both of you, or getting stuck in the fun vs. forever mentality.

Imagine actually loving the guy friends in your life, not with the selfish kind of love so often demonstrated in dating, but with the kind of love God encourages: true, unconditional, selfless love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 tells us about this kind of true love. It's not just the passionate kiss or embrace, but it is demonstrated in self-control, patience, etc. It says, "*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*"

The Gift of Singleness and the Distraction of Boys

Before you are married, you have a gift: the "gift of singleness." It's a gift of time, the one season in your life when you have more extra time than any other.

How will you choose to spend your gift of time? Will you invest all of it into boys and dating, or will you choose to honor God with your time and devote this season of your life to Him? Will you be distracted and dedicate most of your time to a guy, who statistics say you will probably not marry if you are in high school?

Looking back at my high school years, I (Shelley) spent a lot of my time on things that don't really matter today. A huge chunk of my time and energy went into my boyfriends. I have asked God for forgiveness, and He has forgiven me, but I can never get that time back.

Instead of being immersed in boyfriends, you could spend time developing relationships with your family and your girlfriends. Maybe there is someone that needs your support or encouragement. Or maybe you could begin using the gifts and abilities God has given you in a ministry. You could volunteer in a ministry already established or start one of your own under the direction of trusted adults. I know some teens who have written books that have influenced their generations. God could be leading you into many different directions. All you need to do is surrender your time and then listen to where He leads you.

When we have a relationship with God, then we will desire to please Him in all areas of our lives, including this area of dating and relationships.

Instead of worrying about when you'll get a boyfriend or when you'll get married, start enjoying your "Gift of Singleness!"

Matthew 6:34 says, "*Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*" We think that's a great

verse to remember when it comes to guys and dating. Don't worry about who you are going to marry and concentrate on serving God today.

Stop and take a moment right now to pray about this area of dating and romance. If you are willing, surrender to God any current and future relationships as well as your future husband. Ask God for wisdom about how to proceed.



Girls vs. Guys

Knowing These Differences Can Save You Some Pain

Entire books have been written on the differences between guys and girls, book such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. Doesn't it feel like guys are from a different planet sometimes?

We don't want to stereotype guys and girls because not everyone falls into an exact category. However, we do want to get a general idea of how guys and girls are different, especially as they relate to relationships.

Guys are Visual

When I (Shelley) was in high school, I remember my dad taking me aside and telling me the differences between guys and girls. One of the things he told me was that guys are visual and attracted to what they see. He said that I could walk into a room with 10 layers of clothes on and a guy could still be turned on by what he sees. That's just the way guys work.

Guys are visual and attracted to what they see. Not only that, but their main desire in a relationship is for sex. In other words: Guys are wired for sex. They desire it. It's just the way God made them.

God gave us sex to enjoy in a committed marriage for the purpose of having children and keeping the earth populated. God says in Genesis 1:28, "*Be fruitful*

*and increase in number; fill the earth.” God gave us sex to **enjoy**. However, we are to enjoy it within a committed relationship to one person: marriage.*

Hebrews 13:4 says, *“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”*

Girls Long to be Loved

Proverbs 5:18-19 says, *“May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.”*

We ladies tend to be primarily emotional and long to be deeply loved and accepted. We want the intimacy of a relationship. That said, we sometimes give sex for love. We want the emotional bond that comes with sex, not just the physical act, and it does bond us deeply! However, that is not God’s plan for us.

God created sex to bond us deeply with one man in marriage. In the account of creation in Genesis, we are told, *“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh”* (2:24). That’s what sex does. It unites us in a deep, deep way, a way that is intended to make us one forever. It is also something that isn’t meant to happen until we are ready to join every aspect of our lives to our husbands forever.

I like the following illustration for the bonding that happens through sex. Try this at home: take out some duct tape and place a 4-inch strip on the side of your arm with hair. (Seriously, if you have a moment grab the duct tape and do this.) Make sure it is bonded well with your skin and then pull the duct tape off quickly.

Ouch!

The tape probably took some hair with it. Now do that same sequence three more times. What happens? Generally, the tape doesn’t stick as well the more often it bonds to your skin and then is ripped off.

Can you see where I’m going with this illustration? Sex bonds us the deepest with our first partner; therefore, the bond isn’t as deep the more often we have sex with different partners.

The more times you have sex with different people, the less the emotional bond will be, and the less fulfilling sex will be to you as a woman because the emotional bond is primarily what you long for.

Our Culture Teaches Us to Give Sex for Love

If you are interested in pleasing God with your relationships, it's important to know God's standards on sex. Not your friends' standards or the standards you see on TV, movies, music videos, or online, but God's standards. How do we know God's standards? By looking at His Word, the Bible.

*Ephesians 5:2-3,5 says, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. **But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people...For this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person - such a man is an idolater - has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."***

I think those verses are pretty self-explanatory. We are not to have even a hint of sexual immorality.

Some girls may say, "I don't have a relationship with God, so it doesn't matter." However, because of the differences between guys and girls, girls who give sex for love are making a big mistake. Not only are they choosing to go against God's standards and choosing to sin by having sex before marriage, but also they also may not get the love they were really looking for.

Why?

Well, we may think that because sex bonds us to that guy so deeply, he will also have that deep bond and want to stay with us, but it's just not the same for guys. Giving a guy sex is giving him what he wants... he wins.

What happens when you play a video game, or any game for that matter, and win all the levels and know all the secret codes? It gets boring, right? It's no longer as fun to play because it's no longer a challenge.

In a way, that's what happens when we give guys sex. They win the challenge. The thrill of the chase is over, and they may start to grow bored and look for other girls to "conquer." That may sound shallow, but it tends to be true for most guys.

My dad used to say that a girl who lives with her boyfriend is making a mistake, especially if she wants to get married. He said, "Why should her boyfriend ever commit to marrying her if he already has what he wants... sex?" He would use this illustration: "Why buy the cow if you can get the milk from it every day for free?"

Breaking Up is Hard to Do

Back to the duct tape illustration, which time do you think the tape hurt the worst? Taking it off the first, second, or third time? You're right, the first. That's why breaking up with the first guy you've bonded with sexually can hurt so much. Not only that, but you've left part of yourself with him, just like the hair sticking to the duct tape. The good news is that you can be forgiven for what you've done.

1 John 1:9-10 says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."*

If you're like me, you may have already messed up in this area of sexuality. I want you to know you're not alone, and there is forgiveness for you in Jesus. If you want a new start, be encouraged that God can give you a fresh start and cleanse you from all your sins.

It may seem impossible to overcome your past or to remain pure from this day forward, but it's not impossible when you have the power of Jesus at work in your life. 1 John 3:8b says, *"The reason the Son of God (Jesus) appeared was to destroy the devil's work."* That includes past sexual sins.

But just how far is too far? That's what we are going to look at in the next chapter, but before we head over there, there is one more aspect of guys vs. girls that we want to look at. What is it?

Emotional Virginity

Emotional virginity is when your heart is pure, and isn't involved romantically. As a culture, we think it's romantic to give our hearts away and fall in love, but each time we do that, it really does take a little bit out of us. When we give our heart

away, it is really hard to get back. Having control of your heart is probably something you don't think about, but before you dismiss it all together, let's consider the impact it can have.

Have You Ever Been Depressed After a Breakup?

By far, being broken hearted is one of the most frequent prayer requests we get from teen girls. It's too common not to address.

If you're a teenage girl, the chances are either you or a friend of yours has experienced feeling depressed after a breakup. Some depression is normal, but too many girls are getting "stuck" in the hurt and pain.

Statistics have shown a link between sex outside of marriage and depression. But what if you haven't been sexually active? There are still steps you can take to protect your heart and your emotional virginity.

Are the Gates of Your Heart Wide Open? Has Your "Security Guard" Taken a Break?

Have you ever been to a gated community? Some of you may live in one. They are neighborhoods that have a security guard sitting at a gate deciding who comes in and out of the neighborhood. It gives added protection and security, especially in big cities or high-crime areas.

When my husband and I lived in the country of Belize, we lived in a similar situation. Crime tends to be higher in third world countries, so it's more common to have armed security guards at night watching the area. Well, one night we heard a gunshot; our security guard shot straight up in the air to scare off intruders. We later found out some people had climbed the fence and were coming for our house. That night, I believe the security guard saved us from being robbed.

What about you? Do you have a "security guard" protecting your heart, or is your "security guard" on a break?

The Bible says, "*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life*" (Proverbs 4:23). I did a little research on the original Greek meaning of those words. The word guard means "to preserve, guard from dangers, to be blockaded."

And heart means more than just being “mushy, gushy.” It is your mind, will, understanding, inner part, knowledge, thinking, reflection, memory, inclination, resolution, determination (of will), conscience, as the seat of appetites, emotions, and passions.

I’ll repeat it again. “*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*”

How Do I Guard My Heart in Relationships?

Most girls like to talk. And talk and talk some more. Not all girls are this way, but in general we bond by talking.

Guys are not usually this way. They bond through adventure and by doing things together. Think of the guys you know, what do they do when they hang out? Watch or play sports? Play video games? Hunt or fish?

Most girls, however, love to sit and talk.

My husband knows this about me. I like to talk on the phone with him, but he usually doesn’t like it. Why? It’s just one of the ways girls and guys are different.

Because girls bond by talking, it’s easier for us to share our deepest, most inner thoughts with guys. You talk for hours and feel like you are bonding so deeply with him. He’s such a great listener. But what happens is, you can open the gates of your heart too much, too soon; leaving your heart unprotected and unguarded. If you’re married, it could even open up your heart to an “emotional affair.”

Let’s say you tell your boyfriend “everything,” all of your deepest darkest secrets. He’s your accountability partner. You trust him completely. Then, three months later, you break up; however, he still has a part of your heart. Can he still be trusted with it? Who else will he share those deepest, darkest secrets with? Whom do you have to share with now?

Let’s say you spent all your time with him. What will you do with yourself now? Who will you hang out with? Where will you go? Who will you eat lunch with?

Are you starting to understand how sharing too much of yourself too soon can be dangerous? Remember, statistics show that your high school boyfriend probably won’t be the guy you spend the rest of your life with.



How Far is Too Far?

The Answer May Surprise You!

Many people claim to be virgins, but what does that really mean? What is the definition of sex?

Well, to be sure, sex is something that is on everyone's mind... if we'll only admit it! Just read the book of the Bible called Song of Songs to realize that people have been thinking about sex for a long time. You may not be thinking about *sexual intercourse* all the time, but your thoughts may be dwelling on a certain guy in your chemistry class and how to get his attention.

Let's face it, there's something inside each of us girls that longs for guys' attention. We like the way they look, the way they smell, the way they talk. There's just something that changes inside of us when they're around. But, are there any standards for sex, and if so, what are they?

What Are God's Standards for Sex?

God's standards for sex is something I (Shelley) wish someone would have clearly explained to me long ago. It would have saved me some heartbreak, which is something we'll cover later on, but for now...

Where is the Line - How Far is Too Far?

One of the most common question we hear teen girls asking about sex is how far is too far. Many Christian teens have made pledges to abstinence (thinking

abstinence means to avoid sexual intercourse only), but they want to experiment with other things leading up to intercourse so they want a line in the sand drawn for them on exactly how far is too far.

I have to admit that I was one of these girls. I knew I should save sexual intercourse for marriage, but I didn't have a strong standard for all the other things leading up to it. I compromised with several of my boyfriends, allowing things to go further sexually than they should have. Looking back, I now regret those decisions, realizing that one of those encounters even resulted in my boyfriend sexually abusing me. I know God has forgiven me, but I still have had to work through the pain.

That pain is one of the reasons we feel so strongly about sharing God's standards for sex with you. I'm not pointing a finger of judgment at anyone; Heather and I have both been there and gone through it ourselves. Sexuality has been an area in which God has given me freedom, and now I want to lead others to that same freedom I've found.

I'm assuming that you are reading this chapter because you want to please God in this area of your life. Know that I won't condemn you, but I *will* challenge you to live a higher, godly standard in your sexual life. I want each of you to know that you are not without help in this area. If sex is already a stronghold in your life, listen to this:

*“Though we live in this world, we do not wage war as this world does. Our weapons are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary they have **divine power to demolish strongholds.**”*

~ 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

God's Standard of Sex

As we mentioned when describing the differences between guys and girls, God gave us sex to enjoy in a committed marriage. Imagine your house has a fireplace to provide heat in the cold winter months. Let's say that your parents asked you to start a fire when you got home from school. What if you decided to start the fire in the middle of your bedroom instead of in the fireplace? Would your parents come home and think everything was normal? Of course not. There would be consequences, too. You could literally burn your entire house down and be homeless within hours! Talk about being left out in the cold!

Our fire of sexual passion is also designed for the fireplace, the fireplace of marriage.

If our sexual passion is let loose outside the boundaries of a committed marriage, it will leave damage (broken hearts, depression, STD's, unwanted pregnancy, etc.) just like the damage that would occur if you started a fire in the middle of your bedroom instead of in your fireplace at home.

What is the moral of this story?

Keep Your Fire in the Fireplace!

Proverbs 5:18-19 says, *“May your fountain be blessed, and may you **rejoice in the wife of your youth**. A loving doe, a graceful deer -- may her breasts satisfy you always, **may you ever be captivated by her love.**”*

Most of us know that God forbids sexual intercourse outside of marriage. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 says, *“**Flee sexual immorality**. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.”*

Knowing where everything else fits into God's standards is where the lines become gray.

As it says in Ephesians 5:2-3, 5, *“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you **there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality**, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people...For this you can be sure: **No immoral, impure or greedy person - such a man is an idolater - has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.**”*

This is serious stuff! It's not something we should play around with. If you misunderstand what it means to be sexually immoral, you may risk missing out on the inheritance of the kingdom of God. His standard for sexual immorality is *not even a hint*. I know I have not always lived my life according to this standard. How about you?

Webster's Definition of Sex

Let's look at how Webster defines a few sexual terms:

sexual immorality: being unchaste

chaste: innocent of unlawful intercourse

fornication: consensual sexual intercourse between two persons not married to each other

intercourse: physical sexual contact between individuals that involves the genitalia of at least one person.

Did you really read that last definition? I think it's important, so let's read it again. Intercourse is "physical sexual contact between individuals that involves the genitalia of at least one person."

Here is where I never fully understood the definition of sex. I always assumed that intercourse meant penetration and penetration only. I was wrong. Even though oral sex and things like mutual masturbation aren't specifically listed in the Bible, they still involve the genitalia, which according to the dictionary mean you are having intercourse. Does this definition surprise you? It did me.

So what is included in sexual immorality that God detests? Here are a few: penetration, oral sex, anal sex, mutual masturbation, petting parties, rainbow circles, or hooking up outside of marriage. And if we go back to the verse in Ephesians 5:3 that talks about not having even be a "hint of sexual immorality" we can add other things to our list.

On this issue, I'll let you and God decide where to draw the line. Stop right now and ask God what actions He considers a "hint of sexual immorality."

Pressured to Have Sex?

I recently had a girl from a Christian school email me this question: "What if your boyfriend wants to have sex, but you don't believe in it, and you really love him and can't just leave him. Would it be ok to have sex anyway?"

I want each of you to know that no matter how much you love your boyfriend or how much he pressures you, God asks you to honor Him by waiting until marriage. You will avoid a lot of heartache and consequences when you do things God's way!!

You have the right to say no to any boy who asks you or pressures you to have sex. Don't be afraid to tell him "No," even if you have to say it more than once. Any guy who truly loves you will respect your decision and not pressure you. If he continues to pressure you, it may be wise to end the relationship.

Decision Time: Where Will You Draw Your Line Before Marriage?

Will you choose to honor God with this area of romance and dating? Will you decide to reserve intimacy and romance for marriage? Are you ready to surrender this area to God?

If so, you may have developed some habits with guys that will need to change. We can't tell you exactly what this will look like for you. Some girls decide to save their first kiss until their wedding day. Others decide to avoid being alone with a guy friend they are physically attracted to. Wherever you decide to draw the line is between you and God.

Hayley DiMarco, who gives us some suggestions in her book *Technical Virgin, How Far is too Far?*([59](#)) wrote, "Below is a list of stuff that you might one day want to do with a guy. They are kind of in a progression, from least sexual to most sexual... Have a look.

- ~ The Double Take (this is when you ogle your guy and can't stop)
- ~ Talking with him
- ~ Flirting with him
- ~ Touching his arm or leg
- ~ Holding hands
- ~ Touching each other's faces
- ~ Arms around each other
- ~ Kissing
- ~ Touching below the neck
- ~ etc. etc. (I'm not going any farther because I think there's plenty of space above to start drawing your line.)

"So have a ponder. Where will you draw the line when it comes to guys? ... Now talk to someone about your commitment ... anyone who will keep you accountable ...

“Here are some other things and places to avoid if you want to try to keep your line drawn right where it is:

- ~ No spending time in your room with him with the door closed.
- ~ No napping together.
- ~ No lying down together, period.
- ~ No hanging out at home alone.
- ~ No parking to “enjoy the view” or to “just talk”
- ~ No back rubs.
- ~ No drinking. You can lose all memory of lines when you do.
- ~ No dating nonbelievers.

“These are just a few situations that can make keeping your line where you’ve drawn it difficult. So they’re things to avoid.” (60)

Again, your line is between you and God. You have to decide for yourself. Whatever you decide, we strongly encourage you to write down your commitment right now and then share it with at least one person to help hold you accountable and pray for you.

Having a person to keep me accountable in my life has made the difference between having a stronghold and living in freedom in this area of sexuality. I believe the prayers of my accountability partners pulled me through many difficult traps the enemy set up for me.

If you have already made poor sexual decisions and would like to get right with God, do that now. Start by making a decision to change directions and do things differently. Then, ask forgiveness from God **and** forgive yourself (we often forget that!).

We want to close this chapter with this scripture, “*Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes*” (Ephesians 6:11). We are praying for each of you, that you will be able to take your stand against the devil’s schemes. You can send me (Heather) your prayer requests directly, so that I will know specifically how to pray for you at <http://Prayer.TrueBeautyBook.com>

— Share Your Thoughts —

What Do You Think?

How far is too far sexually? Do you think it is possible to remain pure before marriage and honor God with your sexual choices? What has helped you in your decision to stay sexually pure? Share your opinion and read what others have to say at <http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>



Sex and Depression

Is There a Link?

Did you know that research shows a link between sex and depression? It's true. Researchers found that 25% of sexually active teenage girls reported they are depressed all, most, or a lot of the time compared to only 7% of girls who weren't sexually active.(61)

What about you? Have you felt depressed lately, but don't know why? You need to realize that research is now finding that guys have the potential to cause you to be really depressed, especially when taking the self-centered approach to dating.

Check This Out...

“One study of 8,200 adolescents, ages 12-17, found that those involved in romantic relationships had *significantly higher* levels of depression than those not involved in romantic relationships”(62) (emphasis ours).

Yep, you read that right! Most people think it's more depressing to be alone and single, but research is finding the opposite to be true. Unfortunately, guys will not solve all our problems. In fact, they can create more if we're playing the self-centered dating game and experiencing intimacy without commitment, especially when it comes to sex.

Do you wonder why suicide is the third-leading cause of death for teenagers?(63) Or why “one-third of the adolescent population has thought of killing themselves?”(64) Many times depressing thoughts lead to suicidal thoughts. What

is causing depression in teens? Many things may contribute, but sex and romantic relationships are at the top of the list.

Sex is Only a Temporary High

You may think sex is the answer to your problems because it can be fun and exhilarating. However, it's only a temporary high. Short term relief. After that good feeling wears off, you actually are likely to feel *more depressed*.

According to Dr. Meg Meeker who works with many young girls in her practice, "One of the major causes of depression is sex... Teenage sexual activity routinely leads to emotional turmoil and psychological distress."(65)

You Are Not Alone!

One of the reasons we wanted to write this book is to let you know *you are not alone!*

I (Shelley) have felt alone many times in my sexual struggles, but I now realize there are many other girls feeling the same way I do, struggling with the same issues I struggle with. One of the reasons I felt so alone in the past is that most people don't talk about sex. It's uncomfortable and a private matter that is not often talked about, especially in the church.

But, I believe we need to be talking about it. We need to know what God's standards are and how He can help us through our struggles. We need to support each other and know that we're not the only ones struggling and to know there are others taking a stand for purity.

So, I'll say it again, "You are not alone."

Breaking Up is Hard to Do

Earlier, we used an analogy of duct tape to describe the bond created in an intimate relationship, but I recently heard someone describe it this way: It's like you just glued and nailed two boards together. Now, try to pry them apart. There is going to be some damage. The boards are not going to be exactly as they were before, and most likely part of each board will be left on the other one.

Those scarred boards are a picture of what happens when we give too much of ourselves away in a relationship and then break up. It can also feel like an earthquake just destroyed your life. Sifting through rubble. Incredible feelings of grief, sadness, and loss.

Being educated ahead of time can protect you from a lot of damage physically and emotionally. It's easy to say, "This won't happen to me. I'm different. I can handle it." But, what if someone told you that statistics showed that curling irons were the leading cause of house fires? That if you own a curling iron, chances are that you will leave it on, and it will burn down your house? Would you think, "This won't happen to me, I'm different. My house can handle this." No! You would double and triple check to make sure your curling iron was off. Some of you might not even use your curling iron anymore.

Obviously, that's a made up statistic, but the point is that when we know what the consequences of our actions will be, we are then given the opportunity to decide if we want to change our actions or continue with them. Are you tired of the cycle of short term self-centered dating relationships? Are you ready to surrender this area of your life over to God?

The longer your relationship, the farther you go sexually, the more of your emotions you share, the harder the breakup will be. Remember that statistics show you aren't likely to marry your high school boyfriend, and even if you do, chances are it won't be for a happily ever after.

Confession and Repentance: One Way to See Your Depression Evaporate

Want to see your depression evaporate? One way is to deal with the spiritual side of things. Many times, depression can be a result of trying to fill our lives with relationships and things outside of God. When we take care of the spiritual side of life, our depression lifts.

— Share Your Thoughts —

Tell Us About Your Breakup

If you've had a difficult breakup, share your story with us. Wherever you are in the healing process, it's good to know you are not alone. God is able to heal the brokenhearted, and one way He does that is through supporting each other and praying for each other.

Share your story at <http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>



Overcoming Abuse

Healing and Hope

After You've Been Deeply Hurt

Although talking about overcoming sexual abuse is a very heavy topic, we need to address it. There are just too many girls who have been sexually abused to ignore it. Actually, studies and research show that one in three girls is sexually abused before the age of 18.(66) Both of us fall in that category.

One concern we have is the lack of education about sexual abuse. What is sexual abuse? Would you know if you were sexually abused? Full disclosure: we didn't.

I (Heather) was really young when it happened to me. I was sexually abused my stepfather while he was dating my mom. I was only five years old, and hadn't grown up with a dad, so I guess I thought it was a father-daughter activity. I'm not really sure how it worked out in my head, but I was thrilled to have one-on-one time with an adult and assumed the man my mom trusted wouldn't do anything wrong.

Thankfully, one of my sister's friends knew better. When he abused her, she told her mom who contacted the police. That effectively ended the abuse, but finding out what had happened was wrong and dirty made it worse. Counselling couldn't erase the past year or so of my life. It couldn't help me realize the abuse was wrong before it happened, and it's an experience that heavily impacted my life. Part of the impact was guilt over not even knowing it was wrong.

But I am not alone. Shelley didn't have someone step in, so she didn't even realize she had been sexually abused until 20 years later. She thought sexual abuse meant intercourse, like rape. While that is one type of sexual abuse, it's not the only type.

Have I Been Sexually Abused?

What is considered sexual abuse? We hear of the stories of girls being violently raped by a stranger or sexually molested by their fathers or stepfathers like I was. We know that is sexual abuse, but what else might be included?

Here is a definition of sexual abuse from the book *Healing the Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse* by Dr. Dan B. Allender:

“Sexual abuse is any contact or interaction (visual, verbal, or psychological) between a child/adolescent and an adult when the child/adolescent is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or any other person. Sexual abuse may be committed by a person under the age of 18 when that person is either significantly older than the victim or when the perpetrator is in a position of power or control over the victimized child/adolescent.”(67)

Here's a list from Dr. Allender of the types of sexual abuse contact either between an adult and a child or unwanted contact between two people the same age:

Very Severe: Genital intercourse (forcible or nonforcible); oral or anal sex (forcible or nonforcible)

Severe: Unclothed genital contact, including manual touching or penetration (forcible or nonforcible); unclothed breast contact (forcible or nonforcible); simulated intercourse.

Least Severe: Sexual kissing (forcible or nonforcible); sexual touching of buttocks, thighs, legs, or clothed breasts or genitals.(68)

Not included in his list, but also considered forms of abuse include the following:

Exploitation: The use of someone else's sexuality as a means of financial gain, sexual gratification, or social status. Usually by means of sexual activity or photographic imagery.

Exposure: Showing someone genitals or graphic photos with the purpose of shocking, intimidating, or arousing them.

Does anything on that list surprise you?

Denial and Rationalization

If you are anything like me (Shelley), you really don't want to be labeled as being "sexually abused." It's just not the label most people want. However, when I first started coming to grips with what I experienced was a form of sexual abuse, even though it was "just touching," my first step was to come out of denial and admit what really happened to me.

Bringing up those painful memories hurts, so most of the time, we just shove them down and try to forget anything ever happened. At least, that's what I did. Then, I was at a women's retreat and heard a woman giving her testimony. She talked about an instance of sexual abuse that was "just touching," but very painful and hurtful to her. She talked about her healing process and how God freed her from the pain.

That day, as she talked, something she said touched on a raw nerve inside of me. It was as if for the first time I was given permission to grieve what happened to me. It was wrong, I had been violated, and it was okay for me to grieve for what was taken from me that day. My innocence. My trust.

I cried and cried, but they were cleansing tears because, for the first time, I was able to grieve what had happened to me 20 years ago. I always thought that it was "no big deal" and a normal part of growing up, that it was nothing compared to what some people went through. Do you know what I realized that day? I realized that it was a big deal to me, that it had deeply wounded me more than I thought. I needed to heal from it.

Do you know why sexual abuse hurts so much? Sex deeply bonds us with another person. When we have sexual interactions outside of marriage, we are bound to get hurt, whether they are something we choose to do or something that is done to us.

I was angry when I realized what this guy had done to me. I didn't want it yet he still took what he wanted. I realized that I needed to forgive him, although I knew doing so would be hard.

If you've experienced any form of sexual abuse, I recommend talking with someone you trust or considering counseling. I found a good Christian counselor who helped guide me through the healing process. She also recommended *The Wounded Heart Book and Workbook* by Dr. Dan B. Allender.

Getting Help Overcoming Sexual Abuse

More than anything, we want you to know that you're not alone. If you have been abused or are being abused, it's not your fault. It's not your fault you didn't recognize you were being abused. You were a victim, but you don't have to stay one.

I (Heather) let the pain and guilt I had over what my stepfather did to me have a huge impact on my life. By doing so, I allowed him to keep hurting me. I went to counselling right after the abuse was exposed, but that didn't help me. I was ashamed of what had happened and ashamed that I had to go to a counselor, and I got caught up in that shame.

I didn't find true healing until after I came to Christ and learned about the importance of forgiveness. I had to learn to forgive myself for not knowing and my stepfather for what he did to me. I never blamed anyone else, but if you have been through something similar, you may need to forgive the people who put you in that situation or even God. We will talk more about forgiveness in the next section, but for now, know it is important that you reach out for help.

The One who can help you the most, God, is the One we tend to go to last. Talk to Him right now and tell Him about your pain and your situation. Everyone is different, so ask God for wisdom on the steps to take that will be the best for you. He wants to heal your broken heart.

Remember, no matter how dirty or guilty you feel, He still sees you as His beautiful daughter and worthy to be His bride.

— Share Your Thoughts —

What Has Helped You?

Wherever you are in the healing process, it's good to know you are not alone. We want to provide you with a place to help and be helped. You can share your thoughts and read what others have had to say at <http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>. So please take a moment to give your advice and encouragement and tell us what has helped you in overcoming sexual abuse.

God is able to heal the brokenhearted, and one way He brings healing is through the support of others. There is power and freedom in coming together to pray and encourage one another. Don't let shame keep you captive.



Homosexuality

Is it Right or Wrong?

The song *I Kissed A Girl* by Katy Perry got a lot of attention when it was released in 2008, and since then, our world has exploded with the LGBT movement. On June 26, 2015, the United States Supreme Court went so far as to redefine marriage by ruling that it was no longer an arrangement between one man and one woman.

What Do You Believe?

To be honest, I (Shelley) really don't like addressing controversial topics like these because being misunderstood is so easy. However, I've had this topic come up several times lately and feel it's too important to ignore.

A while back, I was at a teen summer camp, and we were traveling in a van to go rock climbing. As we were traveling, I was talking to two of the eighth grade girls sitting behind me. They are both Christians and are involved in the youth group at their church. All of a sudden, they asked me what I thought about homosexuals.

The one girl said her dad was very prejudice about homosexuals and not very nice in the way he responds to them. The other girls said her mom was very judgmental about her friends and judged them by their appearance and not by who they are as a person. They both disagreed with their parents' judgmental responses.

Instead of going right into what I thought, I asked them what they believed. Did they think homosexuality was right or wrong? What were their views on homosexuality?

They both said that although they knew the Bible said it was wrong, they didn't see what was wrong with being in love with someone, even if that person was someone of the same sex. They also mentioned that they knew homosexuals who are really nice.

Basically, they sounded like they were confused. Their upbringing in the church told them homosexuality was wrong, but the culture they lived in told them it was okay. So which is it?

Honestly, I don't think these two girls are the only ones confused. I think there are a lot of people, even Christians, who are unsure how to address the issue of homosexuality in our culture today.

So, What Do You Think?

What are your views of homosexuality? Is it right or wrong?

Well, as I thought about this very controversial topic, I came up with a couple things to consider.

#1 - We Have Been Desensitized

The first time I ever saw two men kissing was at the beach one summer when I was in grade school. I was shocked because I had never seen anything like it before. Not on TV, not in movies, not in public. Nowhere. Until that day.

I still feel uncomfortable seeing two women or two men kiss, but not as much as I used to. Why? I think it's because I've become desensitized to seeing it. You see, over the last several years, the media has started emphasizing homosexuality in our TV shows, songs, movies, music videos, etc.

Not too long ago, we could name a few controversial shows, songs, or moments, but now they are everywhere. JK Rowling made headlines when she announced Professor Dumbledore was gay. Even the Disney channel has infused homosexuality into its TV shows. In fact, in today's world, it is rarer to find a show that hasn't shown homosexual relationships than to find one that does.

Homosexuality is Everywhere and Impossible to Avoid

It's kind of like walking on gravel. Some people, like me, wear shoes all the time; therefore, when we walk on gravel, our feet are very sensitive and hurt.

However, other people have walked around their entire lives without shoes and have developed thick skin on their feet, so they can walk on gravel and not even flinch. The gravel doesn't affect them like it does me. Over time, their feet have become desensitized and calloused.

In the same way, we have become desensitized through the media to homosexuality.

#2 - Different People Struggle with Different Things

You may not struggle with the same sins as I do, but we all have our struggles. I have mine, and you have yours.

Did you know that the word "sin" is an old archery term meaning to miss the mark? When we sin, we miss God's mark or His standard for our lives.

Some people struggle with drinking too much or using drugs. They may not drink just socially; instead, they drink to get drunk. I know this was true for me when I was partying in high school. I didn't drink socially... I drank to get drunk. When I think back on that time, I am very thankful that Jesus rescued me from the path I was on and helped me change directions before it got worse. The Bible is pretty clear that we are not to "*get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit.*" (Ephesians 5:18)

Some people struggle with lust and have tendencies toward pornography, masturbation, sex before marriage, and affairs. Lust can be directed toward the same sex or the opposite sex. Either way, Jesus tells us that lust is a sin. He says in Matthew 5:8, "*But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" Some people struggle with romantic feelings for the same sex and have tendencies toward homosexuality.

Because we are all different, we all struggle with different things. For some, their struggle may be with porn, sex outside of marriage, eating disorders, cutting, gambling, cheating, drugs and alcohol, or homosexuality. The list of possible struggles goes on and on.

It's Not the Temptation That's Wrong

We can all understand this concept with a drug addict. They may be in recovery and “not using,” but still be tempted to get high on drugs. Just because they still feel the “urge” doesn't mean they are still living in sin. It's their actions that follow that temptation thought that count.

As I mentioned earlier, Jesus said that lust in our minds is a sin, the same as having sex with someone would be; therefore, is it wrong to look at a beautiful woman or a good looking guy and feel the temptation to lust after her or him? No. It's not the temptation that's wrong, but what you do with it afterward. Do you linger and allow that temptation to turn to lust as you dwell on her or him?

It's What You Do with It

James 1:4-5 says, *“But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”*

Sin happens in steps. One step leads to another. Check it out

Step 1: Temptation

Step 2: Desire

Step 3: Sin

Step 4: Spiritual Death

It's the same way with feelings toward someone of the same sex. It's not the temptation that's wrong; it's what you do with it. Do you lust after that person and then pursue a relationship with her? Or like the recovering drug addict, do you decide to abstain and allow God's strength to empower you to overcome the temptation?

Sexual feelings and desires are normal. God created us to have them, yet they so often are distorted in our culture today.

Did You Know that God Created Sex?

Yep. He did. God created sex.

Genesis 1:27-28 says, “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.’*”

Genesis 2: 18, 20-24 says, “*The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’ ...But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman, for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”*”

I think that God intended sex to be enjoyed... “*it’s not good for man to be alone.*” Of course, another purpose of sex is to continue to populate the earth, to “*be fruitful and increase in number.*”

God Created Sex to be Enjoyed in One Place... in a Marriage Between One Man and One Woman

Some people won’t like that statement and will try to dispute the Bible. That’s okay. Everyone is at a different place on his or her own journey and search for truth.

I encourage you to investigate the Bible seriously before you decide not to trust it. When I did, I was surprised to find several reasons why I really could trust it as God’s Word and live my life according to it (I shared some of those reasons in chapter 10).

Even beyond the Bible, think about this: does it make sense that sex was intended to be between two guys or two girls?

I was talking to a girl recently who is 25 years old and a lesbian. We’ll call her “Beth.” She is in a committed relationship with her partner; they have built a house together and are having kids together. Well, kind of.

You see, Beth told me about the emotional roller coaster ride she went on when they decided to have kids. Who would carry the baby? The baby could only be from one of them, and then they would have to get a sperm donor to be the father.

It was a tough decision. In the end, they decided to have her partner be the carrier. It was a struggle for Beth. Why? Because deep down, she had a desire to nurture and care for a baby that was her own, a baby from *her* DNA. Most women naturally have this desire. But when a lesbian couple decides to get pregnant, there can only be one natural mother.

Beth said she's pretty confident that she and her partner will stay together, but what happens if they don't? She has no legal rights to their son because he is not "technically" or "officially" hers.

That's the risk she's taken. Over the years, things have changed regarding legal rights for homosexual parents who choose to adopt, but one fact remains the same: the only way to reproduce a living child is with DNA from one man and one woman. That's God's design.

But Know This: God Loves Homosexuals

God loves drug addicts, liars, thieves, murders, adulterers, and homosexuals. He loves self-mutilators, anorexics, and porn addicts, too. He loves us all.

In fact, Romans 5:8 says, "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

That's the beauty of the gospel. That's the love of God. He loves us so much, He sacrificed for us even when we sin against Him. Unfortunately, many Christians haven't displayed this love toward sinners who struggle with sins that are different than theirs. Instead, we have shown judgment and hate towards homosexuals through the years. How they have been treated really saddens me. They don't deserve to be called names or ridiculed. They need to be loved, just like we do.

The Church is supposed to be a hospital for sick and hurting people, people with problems and struggles. People like you and me. In Luke 5:31-32, Jesus said, "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*"

Therefore, we should not be prejudiced against homosexuals or be homophobic, but agents of love. After all, we all have our struggles and need God's grace, but we shouldn't stop there. We should also share with them the truth and the hope that is found in Christ.

Is homosexuality is sin? Yes.

Does it go against God's plans for our lives? Absolutely.

So do a million other things.

One thing I (Heather) have heard time and time again is that there is no hierarchy of sin. All sin is equal in God's eyes. When we get to heaven, there won't be some scale God uses to weigh us to see if we are "good enough." Even if we have only sinned one time in our entire lives. Even if it was something small, it's still sin, and it still disqualifies us from heaven.

Homosexuality is a sin just like getting drunk, lying, stealing, adultery, lust, anger, murder, greed... and the list goes on.

Homosexuality doesn't make us any worse than the other sins, but it still separates us from God. You can read the references for yourself:

Romans 1:24-32 says, *"Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.*

"Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

"Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 says, “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Homosexuality is a sin. It’s listed right there next to idolatry, thievery, and greed, which really brings me to say that we all need Jesus. I know I do. I struggle with sinfulness every single day of my life. Sometimes I come out victorious, and sometimes I finish the day clinging to the cross of Christ and praying no one discovers the depth of my failure.

So What Do We Do?

If we are honest, we will admit that homosexuality is a sin. If you have accepted Christ as your Savior, you should have a problem continuing to live with sin in your life. It doesn’t mean you have to hate anyone or look down on anyone; it just means that you have to recognize homosexuality is not God’s best plan for you. You also need to know that if you are struggling with this temptation or even buried deep in the throes of the LGBT movement, there is still hope. You deal with homosexuality like you deal with any other sin.

You confess and ask God’s forgiveness.

Then you repent. That means change directions. Jesus told the woman caught in adultery, “Go and sin no more.” If you stumble back into it, you get up, dust off, confess, and ask for forgiveness again. The reason we say we struggle with sin is because it is a battle. Sometimes, we come out victorious; sometimes we don’t. But as long as we are fighting against it, as long as we don’t give up, we will be okay in the end. Jesus has us covered.

The Bottom Line?

How should we handle ourselves in a world that is saturated with the LGBT movement?

One quote that has really had an impact on me was from Kristen Clark and Bethany Baird’s book, *Girl Defined*. They wrote, “If God values something, then we should too. If God calls something a blessing, then we should too. We should

never be ashamed or embarrassed to love what God loves.”(70) I would add that if God calls something sin, then we should too.

Instead of pointing fingers, let’s reach out and throw a lifesaver to those who are struggling with homosexuality... or any sin for that matter. Let’s share with them the hope that is in Christ and display the love He has for us.

———— *Share Your Thoughts* ————

Share Your Views on Homosexuality. What Do You Think?

Homosexuality tends to be a controversial topic, even sometimes among Christians. What do you think? What are your views on homosexuality? What are some ways you think we should address this issue?

Share your opinion and read what others have to say at

<http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>

Part Four

Finding Your True Beauty



Connect with God

The Key to Finding Your True Beauty

Throughout the pages of this book, our hope is that you have started seeing beauty the way God created it to be. Not the beauty we see with our eyes, but the true, unfading beauty that comes from within us. The truths we have shared in this book have radically changed our lives, but they are just the beginning.

We are all on a journey, and each of us are at a different place in our relationship with God. Some of you may be just starting to explore who God is and how He can fit into your life. You may have just begun a relationship with God, or you may have been walking with Him for a long time. Wherever you are on your journey, God is close by. He longs to have a relationship with you, but He won't force you to spend time with Him.

Feeling Far from God

I (Shelley) have to admit that I went through a time a few years ago where I felt far from God. I felt like there was a wall between God and me. I didn't feel like praying or reading my Bible. Maybe some of you can relate to feeling that way. Maybe you're in that place right now.

I had to identify the problem in my life that was keeping me apart from God. For me it was unforgiveness and bitterness. Once I recognized it and worked through the process of forgiveness I truly had a desire to change.

This is when I felt like I wanted to talk to God again through prayer and reading His Word. I actually felt like a sponge—just soaking up my time with God. The thing separating you from God may be different. It may look different, but until you identify it and work through it, it will always be there.

Connecting with God Has Helped Me Find My True Beauty!

In order to not be influenced by our culture and the media, I realized that I needed to spend more time with God than I was with the culture, including the media.

There are several verses that talk about our need to stay connected to God and be a vessel for Him. Here are a few:

John 15:5 says, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

Galatians 2:20 where it says, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

And 2 Corinthians 4:7 says, *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”*

Have you ever thought about what it really means to be connected to God?

I (Heather) think of it kind of like my electronics. In order for them to work, they have to be charged up. If I forget to plug my cell phone in, it doesn't work. But if I remember to charge it every night, then it usually will get me through the next day without any issues. The same concept applies to my FitBit, Kindle, and laptop. I have to keep them charged, or they quit working.

I think that's the perfect picture of what it means to be connected with God. God gives us everything we need to get through the day. He fills us with the power of the Holy Spirit, but we will run down if we don't remember to charge up.

Shelley uses the illustration of a hose connected to the faucet. When it's connected, the water flows through it. A person can stand at the end watering dry plants. In her illustration, we are a water hose, a vessel, and the only thing we need to do is stay connected to God, the faucet. When we are connected to the source, God, His water will flow through us. The water represents His Holy Spirit, and Jesus is

standing at the end of the hose guiding and directing the flow of the life-giving water to the dry places, just like Jesus guides and directs our lives.

Are You Connected?

Psalm 42:1-2 says, *“As the heart pants and longs for the water brooks, so I pant and long for You, O God. **My inner self thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?**”* (Amplified)

Think about this question...When do you feel closest to God?

For me, it's when I am outside with my Bible. Just having God's Word at my fingertips and being in the middle of His creation. Breathing His air. Breathing deeply and knowing that God is there. It's as if I can close my eyes and feel Him with me.

What makes you feel closest to God?

For Shelley, it's prayer walks. For one of her friends, it is dancing in her room to worship songs. For someone else, it might be listening to music, reading the Bible, spending time in nature, being silent, etc.

Whatever it is that helps you feel closest to God, we want to encourage you to do more of that activity. Spending time with God, getting recharged every day, is so important.

My Confession

I have this plant. It's a hyacinth (which I can't pronounce, but I love anyway). It smells amazing when it blooms. Its fragrance fills my entire office. I love it. It's supposed to bloom once a year, but it doesn't. It almost bloomed this year, but then it didn't.

Why?

I always forget to water it.

If I would consistently water it, I could really enjoy it, but since I forget, I haven't actually gotten to really enjoy it for several years. Just like my hyacinth needs to be watered regularly, we need to spend time with God on a regular basis.

The point here is that it can be easy to get disconnected. It's easy to say, oh, I don't really need to read my Bible today. I'm in a hurry; God will understand. But the more often we brush God off, the more rundown we get. While the only thing that really matters in the grand scheme of eternity is whether or not we have confessed our sins and accepted Jesus as the Lord of our lives, life is so much easier when we are hooked up with Jesus.

Just like my hyacinth could be truly beautiful if I remembered to water it, our true beauty can really only shine if we stay connected to the source of our living water. The potential is there; it just needs a little TLC. Remember, we are all different, so we encourage you to connect with God the way that works best for you.



U-Turn

Are You Headed in the Right Direction?

One year, my husband and I (Shelley) drove to Florida, and on our way, we stopped to see family in Atlanta. The directions we had said to take 20 East. Well, there was a major Interstate in the middle of Atlanta called 20 East, so we took that road. After driving for 30 minutes on that road, we realized it did not look like the right road.

We called our family, and sure enough, we had taken the wrong 20 East. There is also a 20 East north of Atlanta that we should have taken. We ended up driving an hour out of the way! In order to get back on the right road, we needed to turn around.

Once we realized we were going the wrong way, it wouldn't have made sense for us to keep driving in the same direction. It would have just taken us farther and farther from our destination. Just like we needed to turn around because we got off track, if you're going in the wrong direction in your life and are chasing the wrong definition of beauty, it's time to turn around.

When we got lost, our first step was to admit we were lost and ask our family for directions to get back on track. In the same way, the first step when we get lost in life is to admit there is an issue. We have to first recognize that we are on the wrong path before we can get on the right one. There are many different areas in life where we can be lost; we addressed about several of them in the previous

chapters (poor sexual choices, our personal PR campaign, etc.). It may just be that we have been believing a lie about beauty that has totally impacted our lives and led us in the wrong direction.

What path we are on or what got us started down it doesn't matter. Once we realize we are lost or on the wrong path, we have to actually admit it. We have to confess that we've ended up in a place we don't really want be or that we are headed down a path that isn't leading to the right destination (sexually, spiritually, or otherwise).

Is It Time for a U-Turn?

Once we have admitted that we are not going in the direction we want, the next step is to turn around. Another word for this is repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 tells us, *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*

Repentance isn't a popular word these days. Our culture encourages us to do whatever we want when we want. TV, music videos, and movies rarely show the consequences of poor choices; they just show the fun and cool side of doing what we want. God, however, tells us to *“go and sin no more”* (John 8:11).

Basically, repentance means to stop doing what we're currently doing and start doing something different. Luke 15:7 says, *“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*

An interesting thing to note, is that the word in that verse, repent, means “to change one's mind for the better” in the original Greek language.⁽⁷¹⁾ I think that's a pretty good explanation of repentance... to change your mind for the better.

It's kind of like if you want to make chocolate chip cookies, you have to have a recipe and the right ingredients. The same is true in your life. When you are truly ready to repent, you will change. You will need to change “the ingredients and recipe” you've been using in the past.

~ Maybe repentance means you'll begin listening to different music... music that is positive instead of music that has depressing lyrics and brings you down further.

- ~ Maybe you'll begin to change the filter you see yourself or others through.
- ~ Maybe you'll decide to change your PR campaign and the way you dress.
- ~ Maybe you'll change your friends.
- ~ Maybe you will start uprooting the lies you have been believing and start planting seeds of truth in your life.

One thing is for sure: when you are ready to repent and turn to God, you will want to start filling your mind with God's Word and spending more time hanging out with Him and His Son, Jesus.

It's hard to change. We know. We've both been there, walking down the wrong path and needing to make a U-turn, but that turnaround didn't happen overnight for either of us.

At first, I didn't want to pray or read the Bible. I had no desire to do either, but I slowly began changing the ingredients in my life. I started to dress and act differently. I began spending more time with God than I did shopping (yes, I am a recovering shopaholic!). I began memorizing God's Word to help me overcome my struggles. The list goes on and on. Within one year, I was able to look back on my life and see how I was a completely different person. My husband could see the change. My family could see it. My friend could see it. **When you truly repent and change, people will notice. You will be different.**

Realize that different isn't always bad; it can be good. When I decided to change, I began to see good things happen. A heaviness and a burden I can't even fully express lifted from me. Depression changed to joy. Bitterness faded away. In their places, entered freedom, security, and love that I can't even express in words.

Correcting Your Course

I (Heather) started in a completely different place. I mentioned earlier that I wanted to start spending time with God, but the Bible didn't make any sense to me, and I couldn't see how it applied to my life. I wanted to pray, but I didn't really understand that either.

But I started with little things, such as reading books about the Bible, listening to Christian music, and following Christian women online. The more I read or

listened to, the more I started to understand. Eventually, I got to the point where I understood prayer and could actually hear God speaking to me through His Word.

I noticed significant changes over several years of my life. First I stopped cussing. Then I started praying. A few years later, I changed the way I dressed. Eventually I changed the filter through which I was viewing life and started to see things through the lens of the gospel. I guess you could say that I never really made a U-turn; instead, I made lots of little course corrections... and I still do.

Just like Shelley was going the right direction when she was headed to see her family, but eventually took a wrong turn, the same thing can happen to us. Just because we are on the right road now, doesn't mean we won't take a wrong turn tomorrow. The awesome fact is that it doesn't matter when we get off course, it's never too late to turn around and get back on track.

If you are on the wrong road or find yourself going in the wrong direction, know that the first thing you have to do is admit that you are going the wrong way. Then decide you want to make a change to find the right direction.

What about you?

Are you ready to make a change in your life?

If so, let us know. We want to support you and pray for you. We need each other. Even though I don't know your name or what you look like, I am praying for you and for each person who reads this book. You can send me your prayer requests at <http://Prayer.TrueBeautyBook.com>

God has a purpose and plan for your life. In Jeremiah 29:11 God said, *“For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper and not harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future.”* That isn't a promise that life will always be easy, but it is a promise of hope.

In her study, *Breath*, Beth Moore talks about how God created the whole world in seven days. She said that the fact it took Him just seven days to create the world, universe, all of it, isn't as amazing as that He spread it all out over seven days. He could have spoken it all into existence in one split second, but He waited. He created an incomplete world, a world with something missing, and waited to unfold its beauty. She concluded that, “The overarching message of what's missing is this: something's coming.”(72)

God has a plan for us, but it's still unfolding. There is more to come, but sometimes, God is just waiting on us to make a change to get us going down the right path.

Take a moment to read Julie's story with us as she shares her journey to becoming one of God's prized beauties.

My Journey to Becoming One of God's Prized Beauties

By Julie

Because of the influences our culture has on us as youth, especially the media and our peers, it is very difficult to go through school without being concerned with what everyone else thinks about you. It's also hard to not subscribe to the one-size-fits-all perspective when it comes to standards of beauty, popularity, and relationships. This was true for me growing up.

For as long as I can remember, I was dreadfully afraid of not fitting in. Even though I had many friends from different groups, I never had a best friend. No one seemed to need me as much as I wished they would. I wasn't liked by many boys.

I grew up in a challenging school system where there were a lot of bullies and people were quickly labeled. There were a lot of cliques. I always seemed to enjoy the social environment, being friends with almost everyone, but deep down I felt unloved by all socially.

I was always fearful of confrontation and internalized these feelings. I felt paralyzed when my family members fought with each other and with me. I tried to keep the peace in our household, sometimes by giving in and apologizing or taking the blame for things I didn't even do.

I never thought I was pretty. Or thin. Or anything special on the outside. I knew I was worthy on the inside, but that wasn't enough because I was completely insecure with my appearance, thinking it wasn't up to the world's standards of worth.

I started caring much more about how I was perceived by others than how I perceived myself.

I thought I was a victim because I had a lot of physical conditions, including chronic pain, that made me miss out things growing up and made me feel like I was different than my peers, fighting an invisible and lonely illness no one understood.

I gave in to stress in almost all areas of my life.

I came out of high school with a lot of bitterness, but it wasn't until after college that I began to realize how much it affected my choices and beliefs. I was prone to being influenced by those directly around me, and the reality is, during college a lot of us are still facing an identity crisis, and we tend to rub off on each other. During this time, because of some close peer interactions and the effect the media's portrait of health was having on me, I started paying attention to things like healthy eating.

Because this obsession with healthy eating satisfied me temporarily and was a way I thought I had finally reached a mark of self-discipline and worthiness, it was easy to slide into destructive eating habits and disordered thinking.

I'm convinced that Satan tries to deceive young girls where they are most fragile. For me, this was with health. Issues of health and wellbeing were always close to my heart, as I'd suffered from debilitating chronic pain in much of my upper body for as long as I could remember. I longed to feel well and "normal," and I believe that as a way to numb the pain I felt, I tried to control any aspects of my health that I could, through "better" eating habits, more exercising, and following many of the prescribed techniques magazines give for how to be happy.

Do you know how many times I've wanted to hit the erase button on all of the sin I fell into?

Now, I don't believe God wants to hit the erase button on me or anyone. He wants to use the experiences we've gone through to shape us into someone who learns that apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

This leads me back to Christ. I grew up in a Christian home, but it wasn't for many years that my faith became my own, and I began to actually etch God's truths into my heart, placing my identity more firmly in Him. When I finally realized what God's love for me meant, there was nothing left for me to do but

repent of my sinful ways and unpeel all the layers of defenses I'd built up over the years.

What I didn't realize was how dangerous it could be to become so obsessed with health, to the point where it really skewed my perception of body image. It wasn't until about a year after college when I finally started realizing what these habits were doing to me: controlling my life and seeping joy out of me.

It would not help to place blame elsewhere; I needed to own up to those things. What helped me do this was to realize that God knew the feelings in my heart, and I couldn't hide from him. In Jeremiah 16, we learn that the first step of repentance (experiencing sorrow for and seeking change for wrongs), is to acknowledge that God knows about our sin. I had to release what was holding me back from a living a fuller life, inhibiting me from truly loving myself and others, and even God, the way I needed to.

To do this, I had to look at where I'd been placing my influence. I was constantly trying to reach a level of perfection that was unattainable and not part of God's plan for any of us. He wants us to be who we are, as He knit us each perfectly the way He wants us to be.

I had to realize that some aspects of who I was and also trials I went through were part of God's plan for who I was, and maybe it was that way to bring me closer to Him.

It was then that I became convicted to change a lot of my behavioral patterns that had taken hold of me. Because of all the patterns I had entered into, it was an extremely difficult process to change. Some days, I wanted to give up, but I knew that through His son, God had sacrificed so much that my sins could be washed away. That gave me strength to get through it all.

Day-by-day grace—that's how I got through, and continue to get through. I couldn't worry about the next day because one day at a time was hard enough. Eventually, my absorbing thoughts controlling my eating started to diminish. Little specks of joy that I didn't think I'd ever feel again came back into my life, this time with an overflowing sense of freedom that I'd never felt before.

It was in these times that I truly learned that God's truth had meaning in my life.

I began to rely on God's Word to get me through tough times, as well as constant support from the godly people He placed into my life to be His hands and feet and comfort me when I needed it most.

I allowed my internal struggle to be verbalized and also allowed myself to feel emotions that had been pent up for so long. Through this process of letting go of the power all my obsessions and false idols were having on me, I was able to get healed in more ways than I could have imagined.

God healed me from the inside out, allowing me to want to get help for things that were wrong with my body, and He provided a path to do that.

Jeremiah 16:19 says, "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me." With the physical pain I'd always had, I wondered what it would be like to truly be able to serve Him if I could just have greater energy and without distracting ailments. Surprisingly, what I've found out recently is that if my heart is hungry to serve Him, He allows me to serve and won't let physical pain stand in the way.

I believe that whatever struggles we go through in the flesh and in our thought patterns can be renewed, and God can bring all of us, body, mind, and spirit together again, showing us that He made all of us to work as one for His glory. All my life, I have wanted to be free of health issues, I have wanted a different body, but now, thanks to God, that feeling is gone.

I've had an enormous peace that God knows what He's doing with me, and He has made no mistake with me or any other girl who cries out to Him, wondering why she has to feel different. We are different, and God wants us to be. We are the only one of us that will ever be, so it's important to try and accept and even relish in that thought.



Hope for the Hurting

Healing a Broken Heart

Being a teenage girl isn't easy. Actually, being a woman isn't easy. If you can get through your teenage years without crying into your pillow, you probably deserve some sort of medal. If you can get through them without regrets... well, that probably isn't even possible.

We all make bad choices or have experiences that leave us broken. Throughout this book Shelley and I (Heather) have both shared some of our experiences that left us broken. We've talked about the pain caused by our fathers, abuse, and the world's definition of beauty. However, we are so thankful that we don't have to live in that brokenness. We don't have to be stuck living in regret. We know that there is hope, and we want to share that hope with you.

"He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds."

~ Psalm 147:3

"He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted."

~ Isaiah 61:1

The above verses remind me (Shelley) that there is healing for the brokenhearted. I don't know about you, but that comforts me.

To know there is hope.

The verses in Isaiah 61:1-4 have been significant for me on my journey of healing. The other day, I decided to study these verses in the original Hebrew language and see what they really mean. What I found was actually quite interesting.

The words “bind up” in both verses come from the Hebrew word *chabash*. This word means “to tie, bind, bind on, bind about (like a head band, turban, tiara), to restrain, to bandage.”(73)

Did you notice the word bandage? Because I used to be a physical therapist, I often think in medical terms. I picture God taking the time to come personally and bind up or bandage my emotional wounds. That’s a comforting thought, but that’s not all I found.

Stitch-by-Stitch

The word “heal” in Psalms 147:3 is the Hebrew word *raphe*, which means, “to heal, to sew together or mend.”(74) It’s as if God is healing our hurts stitch by stitch.

Have you ever had stitches? The whole purpose of them is to hold a wound together so it has time to heal.

That’s the picture I get of what this word, *rapha* (“to heal”), does for us emotionally. We can’t see emotional healing like we can with a gaping cut on our arm, but God is able to heal us “stitch by stitch.”

A Broken Heart Can Cripple You Emotionally

Okay, so let’s look at the Hebrew word for brokenhearted, *shabar*, which we find in both of these verses.

*“He heals the **brokenhearted** and binds up their wounds”* (Psalm 147:3).

And, *“He has sent me to bind up the **brokenhearted**”* (Isaiah 61:1).

Here are a few of the definitions: “to break in pieces, rend violently, crush, rupture, to be broken, be maimed, be crippled, be wrecked, be shattered.”(75)

The same word is used in these ways:

“Break the door” (Genesis 19:9)

“Break a bone” (Exodus 12:46)

“Be hurt” (Exodus 22:10,14)

“Torn” (1 King 13:26)

Are you getting the picture?

To be brokenhearted is to be broken into pieces, crushed, crippled, shattered, and torn. It hurts. Some of you know exactly what I mean.

I see a picture of a person in a serious car accident. Because of the accident, their leg bones are shattered. They are crippled, and their bones are broken into pieces. Then, the doctor comes in to do surgery and puts all the pieces back together. He inserts pins and rods and gives them a cast to wear during the healing process of healing and strengthening their legs, but eventually they will walk again.

There is Hope

Do you feel crippled today by your broken heart? Be encouraged and know that Jesus is the “doctor” who can do surgery to bind up and bandage the broken pieces of your heart and help you heal. I know what it feels like to be “crippled” emotionally and spiritually for several years. I also know what it feels like to be able to “walk again” by experiencing the healing that only comes from Jesus. He restored me. Guess what?

He wants to do the same for you.

Let the Healing Begin

All of us have been hurt at some time in our lives and in need of emotional healing. Whether it’s been a bad breakup, parents’ divorce, death of a loved one, abuse, or rejection from friends... we’ve all been there at one time or another.

There have been several times in my life when I was in need of some emotional healing. I want to share with you some of the steps that helped me through some pretty difficult times.

I wish there were quick and easy emotional healing methods I could share with you that would give you instant healing. I do believe that God has the power to heal us instantly, but most of the time, He allows us to heal slowly.

John Eldredge, the author of *Wild at Heart*, wrote, “If you wanted to learn how to heal the blind and you thought that following Christ around and watching how he did it would make things clear, you’d wind up pretty frustrated. He never does it the same way twice. He spits on one guy; for another, he spits on the ground and makes mud and puts that on his eyes. To a third he simply speaks, a fourth he touches, and for a fifth he kicks out a demon.

“There are no formulas with God. The way in which God heals our wound is a deeply personal process. He is a person and he insists on working personally. For some, it comes in a moment of divine touch. For others, it takes place over time and through the help of another, maybe several others.”(76)

Where Do I Start?

Unfortunately, we can’t tell you exactly what to do to heal your broken heart. I wish we could, but everyone is different and responds differently.

Ultimately, you will need to get in touch with God and ask Him for wisdom on where to start.

James 1:5-8 says, “*If anyone lacks wisdom, [she] should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault. But when [she] asks, [she] must believe and not doubt, because [she] who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That [girl] should not think [she] will receive anything from the Lord; [she] is a double-minded [girl], unstable in all [she] does.*” (Changed to feminine)

What Helped Me

Heather and I already wrote about deciding to change directions. That decision is huge, but it’s just the first step. The next step would be forgiveness. Learning to forgive those who hurt you and even yourself, is a must. We will talk about this more in the next chapter.

Another thing you can do is to begin working on your thoughts and the *stinkin’ thinkin’* that may be going on in your mind (see Chapter 5). I know I have had a lot of thoughts and beliefs to change (and still do!).

You may also want to spend time thinking about any habits that may have been passed down to you by your family, any generational issues. Sometimes, we grow up a certain way, and we end up living counter to God’s Word without meaning to.

Those issues separate us from God, cause us pain, and will just continue from one generation to the next until someone breaks the chain.

If you are struggling with certain habits and addictions, we strongly recommend finding an accountability partner or an adult you can trust to meet with and pray with you. It's important to find someone you can trust, and we would recommend that your accountability partner be another girl. Things can get fairly messy when you open yourself completely up to a guy.

Finally, you may need to contact a Christian counselor or your pastor if he is qualified and available and go through some counseling. There have been a couple times I have really benefited from counseling. It's nothing to be ashamed of. We all have times in our lives where we are in need of some extra help and support.

Healing is Possible

Whatever you are going through, it is important to know that Jesus has the power to heal you. Check out these verses:

*“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, **and healing every disease and sickness among the people.**”*
~ Matthew 4:23

*“...and the people all tried to touch him, because **power was coming from him and healing them all.**”*
~ Luke 6:19

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me **to heal the brokenhearted**, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”*
~ Luke 4:18-19

My Broken Heart Restored

I (Shelley) shared in an earlier chapter that I have experienced an incident of sexual abuse when I was in the eighth grade. I didn't recognize it as sexual abuse or even grieve what happened to me until I was an adult.

During that time, with God's empowerment, I began a healing process. It started with forgiveness, which was difficult and not something that came easy for me. One day, while I was praying, I began to ask God where He was during that difficult time.

The picture I got was of the guy on the bus taking a knife and stabbing my heart. It was as if my heart was made of glass and shattered into a million pieces the day the sexual abuse occurred. I saw Jesus standing there crying and then lovingly picking up every last piece of my heart.

He showed me the pieces and then said, "You aren't ready for them now, but I'll keep them safe for you." I then saw Him put all the pieces of my heart into a safe and lock it with a key.

He said to me, "Shelley, you've looked to your husband and to many other things to heal your heart, but I'm the only one who has the key." Then, He looked at me and said, "**Now**, you're ready."

I then saw Jesus taking out my broken heart and holding all the pieces in his hands. It was miraculously restored; all the broken pieces came back together to form a complete heart. He placed my restored heart back into my chest, but it was still not fully functioning and alive. I then watched Him give me CPR compressions to get the blood flowing back through my heart again. The blood represented the Holy Spirit that now flows in and through me through my restored heart.

I can't fully explain the transformation with words, but from somewhere deep inside *I finally felt "whole" again.*

The next week in church when we sang the song, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your strength, with all your mind..." I sensed God saying to me, "Shelley, now you can love me with *all* your heart!!" It wasn't an instant fix, but there was something that happened in my heart that day that started a healing process for me.



Forgiveness...

God's Maximum Strength "Drano"

What do Drano and forgiveness have in common? More than you might think.

Forgiveness is often the first step we take when healing from a hurt. It's also one of the first steps in starting a relationship with God. Usually, we need not only to forgive those who have wronged us and ask God for forgiveness, but also we also need to forgive ourselves.

What Makes Forgiveness So Powerful?

Let's say you owe a credit card company \$15,000 and barely have the money to make the minimum payment each month. Then, imagine receiving a letter in the mail saying they have forgiven your debt, and you no longer have to pay the money back. It's cancelled! You'll no longer need to send a payment each month.

What would you be feeling at that moment?

Most likely, it would feel like a huge weight was lifted off your shoulders. That's just a taste of the joy of forgiveness.

The Weight of Unforgiveness

Just as forgiveness can be so powerful, so can unforgiveness.

I (Shelley) heard a story about unforgiveness that I'll never forget. Someone once said that unforgiveness is like carrying a dead person around with you everywhere

you go on your back. Eventually, your skin will begin rotting away from carrying around that carcass.

Sounds pretty gross!

That example is a picture of what can happen to us when we choose to carry unforgiveness in our hearts toward someone. I know; I've done this before. Emotionally, bitterness and resentment began to take root and eat me away on the inside. I bet some of you can relate.

God's Maximum Strength "Drano"

1 John 1:9 is God's maximum strength "Drano." There are often things that "clog" up our relationship with God. They block our communication with Him to the point where we feel like we're hitting a brick wall with our prayers.

Those "clogs" are our sins, the ways that we've missed God's mark or His standard for us.

Back to 1 John 1:9 where we read, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

Here's the same verse in the Amplified version, *"If we [freely] admit that we have sinned and confess our sins, He is faithful and just (true to His own nature and promises) and will forgive our sins [dismiss our lawlessness] and [continuously] **cleanse us** from all unrighteousness [everything not in conformity to His will in purpose, thought, and action]."*

I like how the Amplified says it, *"continuously cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

I have experienced this unforgiveness in my life. I had allowed some bitterness to take root in my heart and some unforgiveness towards some people who had hurt me. They were people I trusted, which made their betrayal even harder.

Finally, I allowed God to come into my bitter and broken heart. The first step for me was forgiveness by forgiving those who hurt me, asking God's forgiveness, and finally forgiving myself.

It felt as if that “clog” between God and me was finally removed! It opened up the passage way and I felt like I wanted to talk to God again through prayer and reading His Word.

That’s the joy of forgiveness, where your tough clogs don’t stand a chance!

The Forgiveness Cross

One thing we have found helpful in our own forgiveness journeys is what we call the forgiveness cross. It has three steps.



Step 1) Forgiving Others

First we need to be willing to forgive those that hurt us. This is the horizontal part of the cross.

For me, forgiveness did not happen immediately and was not easy. It took time, but I knew this was the first step I needed to take.

In forgiving the people who had hurt me, I wasn’t saying that what happened was okay, but I was releasing the burden over to God. He is the ultimate judge and will hold them accountable for what they did to me.

Here are a couple of verses about forgiving others:

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” ~ Matthew 6:14-15

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” ~ Mark 11:25

Step 2) Asking God's Forgiveness

The next step is asking God's forgiveness. This step is the vertical portion of the cross.

Ephesians 4:31 tells us to, *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."* Unforgiveness is like a big pool of all those things. It causes bitterness and anger and can lead us to say mean things. Because it doesn't lead to a life of happiness or righteousness, we have to ask God to forgive us for harboring that unforgiveness.

If you don't know how to pray and ask God's forgiveness, a good place to start is with Psalm 51.

Step 3) Forgiving Yourself

The final step is one we often overlook. It is the step of forgiving yourself. Think about this as the circle at the middle of the cross. I realized that I was carrying around a lot of regret and self-condemnation for the mistakes I had made. God reminded me that even though I had forgiven others and had asked His forgiveness, I still hadn't forgiven myself.

What if You Feel Like You Don't Deserve Forgiveness? You've Messed Up Big Time!

Let's say I have a \$100 bill. Would you want it? You bet! You could go to the mall and go on a shopping spree.

Well, let's say I take that \$100 bill, step on it, and rub dirt into it. Would you still want it? You bet!

What if I then took that \$100 bill and spit on it. Would you still want it? Has it lost any value? Could you still go on that same shopping spree with it? It still has the same high value it started with. It is still worth \$100 and can be spent in any store.

Did you know that God sees you the same way?

No matter how much stuff you've been through, how you've messed up, or what has been done to you, you still have the same high value God gave you when He created you.

I (Heather) love the way my pastor explained our worth to God. He compared it to the security pillow he had when he was a child. He took it everywhere. It ended up dirty and nasty, but he still wanted it. If he forgot it, he wanted to go back for it.

Did you have anything like that when you were a child?

One of my daughters had a stuffed puppy. We got it at a thrift store, so it was used already, but she loved it instantly, so we got it for her. That puppy went everywhere. It was drug through the dirt, used as a Kleenex, and traveled on several vacations. She had it for years. We couldn't have sold it to anyone by the time she outgrew it. It had been stitched back together more times than I could count and still had a hole in it. The stuffing was smashed to the point it was limp. What once was a white dog with brown spots, ended up more of a light brown dog with brown spots, and no washing could restore its original color. But it had incredible value to her.

I remember one time she was playing with it in the car, and it ended up out the window. We had to turn around and go get it. Not because we could sell it for a profit. It didn't have any monetary value, but it had incredible value to our little girl. No amount of dirt or wear and tear could change that.

God values us the same way. It isn't about how pretty we look on the outside. It isn't about what others see in us. It doesn't matter what experiences we have been through or where we have failed to meet God's standards. We have value because He gave it to us. We have value because He loves us.

So with that thought in mind, we want you to know that if you've messed up in any area of your life and want forgiveness, it's there for you. Just like we turned around to rescue that stuffed dog, God is more than willing to rescue you. That's why He sent His Son. *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace..."* (Ephesians 1:7).



You Are Beautiful

It's Time to Let Your True Beauty Shine

In the beginning of this book, we shared some statistics and quotes about extent of the beauty crisis we are facing. We talked about the lies we are faced with as women, and how those lies can affect our lives. Our hope through all of this is that you have learned to look past the world's definition of beauty.

We hope that you no longer have to look in the mirror and ask, "Am I beautiful?" but rather that you would be able to close your eyes and know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are.

We pray that you have been able to identify lies that the media and culture have been promoting, and are equipped to overcome them with God's truth. Because God's truth is that you are His beautiful creation. When that truth seeps into your heart, it will radiate out from you for the whole world see.

We want to close this book with a poem Shelley wrote. Several years ago She had an identity crisis, and as she began to find her true identity she wrote this poem. Maybe you can relate as well...

“Who Am I?” *Self-Esteem Poem*

Who am I?

My first answer would probably be my name. But, my name does not describe who I am on the inside. I could then give the title of my profession. But that is what I do. I could tell you I am a wife, a sister, and a daughter. But those are my relationships.

So I ask again... Who am I?

I could describe myself as an extrovert and outgoing. That is my personality. I am organized in planning events. But that is a gift God has given me. I could describe my appearance, but that is not who I am either.

So many times I have believed what others say I am. If I receive affirmation, then I feel worthwhile.

However, when I receive criticism, I feel like a failure. I have chosen to ride the roller coaster of emotions, instead of believing the truth of what God says about me.

I have tried to work harder to prove that I am worthwhile. Yet every time I mess up or fail, I am reminded that I will never measure up.

I will never be pretty enough or talented enough. I will never be skinny enough or do enough good things for God. I will never be a good enough wife or sister or daughter. But I keep trying harder and harder. I believe the lie that if I continue to try harder, I will finally be “good” enough.

One day, God gently said to me, “Stop trying so hard to prove yourself to others. Get your worth from Me. I’ve already given it to you. Remember My grace. It’s a free gift and nothing you can achieve by trying harder.

“Rest in my grace.

“You are working so hard to have a certain position in the eyes of others. To be well-liked and to have popularity. You want to be appreciated for what you do.

“But I want you to know that you already have an elevated position.

“Because you have a relationship with My Son, Jesus Christ, you are a part of My kingdom as My daughter and co-heir with Christ. Because you are the daughter of a King, you are given the position of being a princess.

“You are My princess, a royal princess.

“Remember that an earthly princess is not special because of who she is or what she does. She has status and position because of who her dad is, a king. She has royalty in her blood.

“You have royalty in your blood as well. You are the daughter of a King. And no matter what you do, your status will never change.

“I have chosen you, and I have a plan for your life. I will not forget you and will be with you always. I have engraved you in the palm of my hands.

“Rest in the knowledge of who you are in Me. Nothing else will ever be enough.

“You are My daughter, and I love you!”

———— *Share Your Thoughts* ————

What Are Your Thoughts?

Could you relate at all to this poem? Do you have your own story of finding your identity and self-esteem?

Let us know what you think! Share your opinion and read what others have to say at <http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>

Let Your Beauty Shine

Well, dear sister in Christ, it's time for us to bring this book to a close. Wherever you are today, we hope you will join us as we take a stand for our true beauty. It's time to stop letting the media, guys, and life define us. It's time to let our true beauty shine!

Appendix



Do You Need Jesus?

Have you ever wondered if you really need Jesus in your life? Maybe you think you've never sinned, or you've got things under control on your own. Maybe you think that the whole Jesus thing is just overrated. Whatever thoughts you may have had, we wanted to take a moment to explain why we believe we all need Jesus.

Who Needs Jesus Anyways?

Have you ever done something you knew you shouldn't do, but you wanted to do it so badly that you did it anyway? Maybe it was eating something your mom or dad said not to, or maybe it was being mean to your brother or sister because they were mean to you first, or staying up late when you knew you were supposed to be in bed. Or maybe it was something else, but still, you knew when you did it, you shouldn't have.

The Bible tells us that if you know what is right and you don't do it, that's called sin (James 4:17).

And do you know what else the Bible says?

It says that everyone in the whole world has sinned (Romans 3:23). Even the good guys. Your mom and dad, pastor, favorite teacher, us... all of us have sinned because we have all done something we knew we shouldn't have done.

The Security Tag Dilemma

Mark Cahill used the example of a security tag. He asked what would happen if you walked out of a store with a security tag on your jeans. You know what would happen, right? The security alarm would go off. He encourages us to picture Heaven the same way. Like Heaven has security alarm sensors that are set to go off when they are triggered by our sin.

It's as if we are all walking around with a security tag on our jeans, representing our sin or the ways we've fallen short of God's standards. None of us meets the standard God has set for us on our own. That means every one of us are going to be separated from God in a place the Bible calls Hell unless we embrace God's solution to this massive problem.

The Good News

God does not want you to be separated from Him. You may not have a good image of God for various reasons, but you need to know that He has provided a way for you to be forgiven.

The Bible says that the God of the Universe became a man (Jesus Christ) and suffered and died on the cross for your sins and mine so that we could be set free. Then He rose again from the dead and defeated death! It's as simple as this: we broke the law, and Jesus paid our fine.

“God demonstrated His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” ~ Romans 5:8

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us.” ~ Galatians 3:13

In John 14:6 Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

Jesus is the only way to remove our “sin tag” so we can get into Heaven.

When we accept Christ, He covers us with His blood. He paid the price for us. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 tells us, *“You are not your own; you were bought at a price.”* We have been bought and paid for. Just like when you buy a pair of jeans, and the

cashier removes the security tag, when we accept Christ's payment for our sins, He removes our "sin tag."

Being "Good" Does Not Get Us into Heaven

Have you ever tried to remove the security tag from jeans? If it's one of those ink filled ones, it can get pretty ugly. You have to have a special tool. Our "sin tag" is the same way. We can try to remove it by balancing out our sins with good stuff, but it doesn't work that way.

You see, we do not get to heaven by doing good things, going to church, or reading our Bibles. We cannot earn salvation, and we do not deserve it. God is offering salvation to us as proof of His love for us. We are saved through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross by grace alone.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." ~ Ephesians 2:8

I (Heather) love John 3:16, which says, *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."*

Jesus Was God's Gift to Us

Jesus came to live a perfect life and die on the cross for our sins. Then, God raised Him up and made Him alive again. Now, He will live forever, and He said He is saving a spot for us, too (John 14:3).

He paid for our sins, and He wants to share His reward with us—how cool is that?!

Romans 6:23 says, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Although all of us have sinned, **God sacrificed His own Son so that we could live forever with Him**—He loves us that much!

However, the Bible says that we have to choose whether or not we love Him, too. It tells us in Romans 10:9 that in order to spend eternity with God, we have to confess (or tell people) who He is and what He has done for us and believe it in our

hearts. We can't just say we believe and not care; we really have to believe that God sent Jesus to die for our sins because of His love for us.

The Sale of the Year

Here's something else to think about: If your favorite store had a 50%-off sale on all clothing today, would you buy anything?

Most of you would.

Now imagine that they had a 99%-off sale on all clothing, would you buy anything?

Not only would you probably buy something, but you'd probably get some stuff for your family and friends, right?

If you would accept an offer of 99%-off the price of a piece of clothing, why in the world wouldn't you accept the offer of 100%-off of all your sin (past, present, and future) washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ?

It is literally the best deal in the entire universe.

What Does It Mean to Begin a Relationship with Jesus Christ?

Let's think of it this way, you are in an airplane and have to jump out of the plane at 25,000 feet. You wouldn't just "believe" in the parachute; you would put it on! The parachute will do nothing for you unless you decide to put it on and put your complete trust in it. You know that if you don't have that parachute, you'll die, so you put it on and trust in it to take you safely to the ground.

Starting a relationship with Jesus means to trust in Him personally the same way you'd trust in a parachute if you had to jump at 25,000 feet out of an airplane. There are millions of people who "believe" Jesus exists, but they have not yet put their trust in Jesus to save them from their sins when they die. There is a **big** difference that will become obvious when you "jump" through the door of death.

Are you ready to begin a relationship with Jesus today?

We encourage you to turn away from sin and surrender your life to Jesus Christ. Please don't put this decision off until later. You probably don't have all the answers to your questions yet, but better to put on the parachute first and then ask questions than to pass through the door unprepared, grasping for the parachute when it's too late.

If you are making this step for the first time, contact me and let me know. I want to pray for you and send you some resources to help you grow in your relationship with Jesus.

You can contact me online at <http://www.teen-beauty-tips.com/starting-a-relationship-with-jesus.html>

If you make this decision, God will transform you from the inside out. You will think and feel differently as you learn to trust and obey Him. God will give you new strength to live right and to love Him above all else. We even have some tips for you in the next section to help you connect with God and grow your faith.

Still not sure? Have questions?

We are sure many of you have questions about eternity, Heaven and Hell. If so, I (Shelley) recommend the book, *One Heartbeat Away, Your Journey into Eternity* by Mark Cahill. You can purchase it at www.markcahill.org.

It is one of the best books I've read on this topic of eternity.

This book provides answers to questions like...

- ~ Can you prove there is a God?
- ~ Doesn't evolution disprove the existence of God?
- ~ Can you prove the Bible true?
- ~ What is out there after I die?

If you would like a copy of *One Heartbeat Away*, but can't afford it, you can request a free copy at <http://www.oneheartbeataway.org>

We want you to know that we are praying for each of you who read this book. We pray that you will be able to find the answers to your spiritual questions and connect with God in a real and personal way. We know each of you is in a

different place in your spiritual journey, so please feel free to contact us with your questions. You can find our [complete contact information in the back of this book](#).



3 Ways to Connect with God

If you have accepted Christ as your Savior, you have made the biggest decision of your life. However, making that decision was just the first step in your walk with God. In this section, we want to share some of the different ways you can connect with God and strengthen your relationship with Him.

1. Read and Study God's Word

One of the best ways you can get to know God better is by reading your Bible. Even if you just read a little bit each day, you can learn a little bit more about who God is and how much He loves you.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*

In Chapter 10, we talked about why God's Word is important. It's His love letter to us and how He communicates His desires to us; therefore, digging into His Word is a fabulous place to start. You can find Bible reading plans online, look for a local Bible study group, or just pick up the Bible and start reading through it on your own. There is no one-way to read the Bible.

We also have free devotionals available on our website. Each one starts with a Bible verse and talks about how you can apply it to your life. Kind of like a mini

Bible study. You can get those free via email daily or weekly at FindYourTrueBeauty.com/devos.

2. Praying God's Word

Praying God's Word is one way to replace the "weeds" in your life with truth. I (Shelley) read a book by Beth Moore called "Praying God's Word" that changed my life.

In that book, Beth talks about the power that comes from using prayer together with the Word:

"You and I are just about as effective as the crew with loud mouths, sticks and stones when we try to break down our strongholds with carnal weapons like pure determination, secular psychology, and denial. Many of us have expended unknown energy trying hard to topple these strongholds on our own, but they won't fall, will they? That's because they must be demolished. God has handed us two sticks of dynamite with which to demolish our strongholds: His Word and prayer.

"What is more powerful than two sticks of dynamite placed in separate locations?

"Two strapped together.

"Now, *that's what this book is all about*: taking our two primary sticks of dynamite -- prayer and the Word -- strapping them together, and igniting them with faith in what God says He can do."[\(77\)](#)

How to Pray God's Word to Overcome Your Specific Struggle

Your struggle is probably different from mine; therefore, you can customize this idea of praying God's Word to whatever struggles you are going through.

First, identify what struggle is overwhelming you right now. For instance, it could be "fear."

Next, look up verses on the specific topic of fear. I use a concordance in the back of my Bible or one online, like www.BlueLetterBible.org.

After you find some verses that relate to what you're going through, then you re-word the verses into a prayer.

For instance, let's take Isaiah 41:13-14:

“For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, do not fear; I will help you. Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel, do not fear, for I myself will help you,” declares the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”

I re-worded it to this prayer: “Father, You are my God, who takes hold of my right hand and tells me, ‘*Don't be afraid; I'll help you. Don't be afraid, Shelley, for I myself will help you.*’ Thank You, God, that I can depend on You. You don't say ‘*I might help you,*’ but that You **will** help me.”

This concept of praying God's Word is powerful! My prayer is that many of you will begin to apply these two sticks of dynamite to overcome your struggles. Remember, we have been given “*divine power to demolish strongholds.*” (2 Corinthians 10:4)

3. Memorize Bible Scriptures

When you read the words “memorize Bible scriptures,” what comes to your mind?

Some of you may be groaning right now because you are thinking about growing up in Sunday School where the smart kids got candy for memorizing verses, and you didn't. Or maybe you have had bad experiences trying to memorize in the past. Maybe you tried to memorize something for a school play and were embarrassed because you messed up in front of a huge audience.

Whatever your experience has been, we want to challenge you today to think differently about why memorizing Bible scriptures is important and how doing so impacts your true beauty.

You Are the Bride of Christ... A Warrior Princess!

We face a real battle of good versus evil each day. The Bible says we are the bride of Christ; therefore, I like to think of myself as a Warrior Princess!

Now, that title sounds adventurous and exciting, doesn't it?

As a Warrior Princess, think of your sword, your only offensive weapon against our enemy Satan, as the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17, “*...the sword of the Spirit,*

which is the word of God.”). Have you practiced using it lately? Do you know it well?

Personally, I have felt convicted lately that I am not very prepared for that battle I face each day in the spiritual world. As I recently started making an effort to memorize God’s Word, I noticed that those scriptures come to my mind just at the time I needed them.

I think of memorizing God’s Word kind of like fencing practice. The only way you get better at it and become more prepared for the real battle is to practice. That’s a picture of what we’re doing when we memorize God’s Word.

Girls, we’re getting prepared for the battle!

What Verses Should We Memorize?

The best thing to do is choose verses that relate to what you’re going through right now. That’s what I do. Then, I’m more motivated to memorize them.

So, if I’m feeling fearful, I memorize verses about fear and trust. If I’m feeling overwhelmed, I memorize verses about God’s power to help me. You can use a concordance to look up verses for just about any topic!

Why Do We Need to Memorize Scripture?

Chuck Swindoll wrote, “I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture... No other single exercise pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your witnessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified.”(78)

Billy Graham said, “I am convinced one of the greatest things we can do is to memorize scripture.”(79)

There are many reasons to memorize Bible scriptures, but we want to focus on just one.

Daily Victory Over Satan and Our Sin

If for no other reason, think about this: the way Jesus overcame Satan's temptations in the desert was by quoting scriptures (Matthew 4:1-11). If Jesus used scriptures to overcome temptation, maybe we should too.

2 Corinthians 10:5 reinforces this concept when Paul wrote that we should *"take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."* Memorizing scripture helps us to train our thoughts to think like Jesus. This is something I (Heather) have struggled with: taking my thoughts captive. It's one thing to argue with myself about what I think; it's another thing entirely to battle destructive thoughts with the very Word of God.

Here are a few more verses to help you in your battles:

Psalm 119:9-10 says, *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word... I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."*

Ephesians 6:17 talks about *"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* as our only offensive weapon against our enemy.

One of my favorite Scriptures is Hebrews 4:12, which says, *"For the word of God is alive and active..."* The words in the Bible aren't just from some old book. They are relevant to our lives today, tomorrow, and forever, and they pack a powerful punch. However, it's hard to live by something if you don't know what it is.

That's why memorizing Scripture is so important. You will get so much more out of the Bible if you don't just open it once a week or even once a day, but you can carry scripture with you in your mind, ready to pull it out at a moment's notice.

Kristen Clark said something in a YouTube video that really stuck with me. She said, "You are not ever going to feel confident in Christ unless you are getting to know Him." We get to know God through His Word. Memorizing it helps us not to have to look up Bible verses every time we have a question about what God says. We just know.

How to Memorize Bible Scriptures Using Music

Adolf Hitler knew the power of music. He said that if you give him the music of the youth of any culture, that he would have that culture in the palm of his hand. His tactic was to change the words of popular anthems to get his political themes into the minds of the young people.

His plan worked.

Music can also be used to get God's Word into your mind. Here are a few places you can find scripture set to music online:

www.popscripturesongs.com
www.theversesproject.com
www.scripturesongsforworship.com
www.scripturemusic.com/mp3.htm

A ton more places can be found, but those should get you started. It's also neat to know that many Christian songs and hymns are based off Scripture. If you have a favorite song, you can look up them up to see what Scriptures they are based on. A good resource for this is wordtoworship.com where you can search the name of the song or a scripture you are looking for.

Use Pictures to Help You Memorize Bible Scriptures

Have you ever realized that a picture will help you remember something better? It has been found that some people are visual learners, some are auditory learners, and some are both.

I (Shelley) have begun to picture verses I wanted to memorize in my mind. I recently did this with Psalm 91:4 that says, *“He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.”*

I visualized a shield of protection around me. A wall around me where I am safe from harm. I could picture this as an umbrella when it is raining.

I then find a picture I am able to use and add the scripture to it to put on my mirror or in a place I'll see it. Heather uses an app on her iPhone to add Scripture to pictures to use as the background on her phone. Every time she picks it up, she has

her verse right in front of her. There are lots of apps you can use for creating these photos. She currently uses WordSwag, but there are some free ones to be found as well.

Other Ideas

- ~ Write the scripture on your mirror with a dry erase marker.
- ~ Put the scripture on an index card and carry it in your purse or pocket and look at it throughout the day.
- ~ Save the verse in your phone in a note.
- ~ Make the verse your desktop graphic on your computer.

Use whatever works for you!

If we can memorize the lyrics to thousands of songs, we definitely can memorize scripture.

Remember that God is able to help you understand His Word and apply it to your life. Luke 24:45 *“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”* If you take the challenge to memorize Bible scriptures, we guarantee you won’t regret it!

Your relationship with Christ is the most important relationship you will ever have. The more you get to know Him, the more powerfully He will work in your life, and the stronger your faith will become. Jesus can change your world. Maybe He already has.

Our faith in Christ has carried us through a ton of life's junk, and we know without a doubt, that your faith in Christ can do the same. We encourage you to get connected with God and choose to walk with Jesus each and every day.

— Share Your Thoughts —

How Has God Been Working in Your Life Lately?

What has God been teaching you through His Word, the Bible? It could be something big or something little. Whatever it is, share it with us and be an encouragement to others.

Share your opinion and read what others have to say at <http://Share.TrueBeautyBook.com>

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Session One

The Pretty Problem

Chapters 1, 2 & 3

1. Who or what do you think influences you the most on your ideas of what it means to be beautiful?
2. Do you believe you were created to be beautiful? Why or why not?
3. How do you think God would define “beautiful”? What makes us beautiful in His eyes?
4. Can you relate to Amber’s story in chapter 3? If so, in what ways?
5. If someone came to you with a similar problem, what encouragement would you offer them?
6. Look up Colossians 3:23-24. What can we learn about beauty from those verses?

Reflection: What is one thing you could do this week to focus more on your inner beauty instead of just your outer beauty?

Journal: Read Psalm 139 and write a prayer thanking God for the way He created you.

Read: Chapters 4 & 5 for the next session.

Just for Fun: Bring your favorite Barbie or other type of doll from when you were younger to the next session.

Session Two

Subliminal Beauty Messages

Chapters 4 & 5

1. What did you think about the story of Cindy Jackson trying to become Barbie?
2. What about you? What influences in your life have shaped the way you view your body (internet/magazines/television shows)? Is there a media that may be influencing you indirectly, such as Heather shared about near the end of chapter 4?
3. Share about the doll you brought, or if you don't have one, share about your favorite doll from when you were younger and how you think it might have influenced your body image.
4. What would be some signs that you might be addicted to social media? (Could you be addicted?)
5. Do you think there is any danger in portraying a false image of yourself on social media?
6. Does what we post on social media really matter? Why or why not? After you have answered that question, read Matthew 7:15-20. Did your answer change?

Reflection: Read the six questions at the end of chapter six about the way you use social media and take a moment to honestly reflect on your answers.

Journal: Write down how media (of any kind) has been influencing your self-image. If you need to make any changes to the media you are taking in, or the way you are using media, write that down as well.

Read: Chapters 6 & 7 before the next session.

Session Three

Beauty Lies

Chapters 6 & 7

1. What does Shelley's mom call the lies we believe? Do you think that's a good representation of those lies?

2. How can we replace the lies we believe with God's truth? What were the steps shared for weeding out lies in chapter six?

3. How can we know if we are putting too much stock into our outer beauty?

4. Have you believed the lie that if you could change one thing about your body, that others would accept you and you would be able to accept yourself? Do you recognize it as a lie, or do you believe it's true?

5. Which of the stories shared in the book so far can you relate to the most? It could be a story from Amber, Rehan, Kandace, or one of the stories Shelley or Heather have shared.

Reflection: Do you focus more on the weeds and/or "cracks on the floor" of your life than you do on God's truth?

Journal: Write out a lie you have been believing about your beauty, and then write out what God's truth is. Complete with Scriptures to back up what you know to be true. (Check out the lies below if you need help getting started.)

Read: Chapters 8, 9 & 10 before the next session.

Lies vs. Truth

Lie: My physical appearance is the most important thing about me.

God's Truth: *"Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart."* 1 Samuel 16:7

Lie: I have messed up too much for God to forgive me.

God's Truth: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and us from all unrighteous."* 1 John 1:9

Lie: I don't have any friends.

God's Truth: Jesus is our friend! *"I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."* John 15:15

Lie: I have to please or impress others.

God's Truth: *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."* Colossians 3:23-24

Lie: I could never do ... (that).

God's Truth: *"I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."* Philippians 4:13

Lie: My life will never amount to anything.

God's Truth: *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*
Jeremiah 29:11

“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Psalm 139:16

Lie: I will not make the right choices for my future.

God's Truth: *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.”* Proverbs 3:5-8

“If anyone lacks wisdom he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him.” James 1:5

Lie: I am all alone.

God's Truth: *“God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”*
Hebrews 13:5

“The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”
Zephaniah 3:17

Session Four

What Do You Believe?

Chapters 8, 9 & 10

1. Did you ever consider that your beliefs about evolution and creationism could affect the way you view yourself and others? Why or why not?
2. What are some things we can know about ourselves based off the knowledge that we were created by God?
3. How can the way we view our earthly father affect the way we view our heavenly Father? Have you ever struggled with this?
4. Have you ever struggled with believing God's Word or understanding how it could be relevant to your life? Why or why not?
5. What are some ways we can know what God wants from us in modern-day dilemmas? Can you share an example?
6. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Based off that Scripture, how important is God's Word when it comes to being a Christian?

Reflection: Do you value what God says in His Word, and try to live in a way that pleases Him, or have you been living life for your own pleasure, disregarding His will?

Journal: If you have struggled with one of the topics from this lesson, write out what you have struggled with and what God's Word says about it. Here's a list of possible struggles you may have faced:

- ~ Believing you were purposely created by God with meaning, beauty, and importance.
- ~ Separating your earthly father's failures from your heavenly Father's perfection.
- ~ Trusting the Bible is true.
- ~ Having blind faith in the Bible
- ~ Understanding how the Bible is relevant to your life.

Read: Chapters 11 & 12 before the next session.

Faith & Fashion

Chapters 11 & 12

1. Considering the four points Heather shared in chapter 11, what are some ways we advertise ourselves? Based on those points, do you think others see you the way you really want them to?
2. What do you think plays into the way guys treat girls? Does our clothing matter? Why or why not?
3. What would you say influences you the most in regards to the clothes you buy and wear?
4. In chapter 12, Shelley shared four things she discovered about her clothing choices. Can you relate to any of them, or see how they might be true in your life?
5. Read Luke 17:1-3 and Matthew 5:28, then discuss how can those verses relate to the way we dress. Do you think we have a responsibility in helping the guys around us to have pure thoughts?

Reflection: How are you looking to others to satisfy your needs instead of looking to God? Do you need affirmation, praise, or attention from someone or something to feel good about yourself?

Journal: Use the journaling prompt: “Something I feel challenged by God to do this week in response to these chapters is...”

Read: Chapters 13 & 14 before the next session.

Just for Fun: When you come to the next session, where an outfit you think is both trendy and modest.

Session Six

Modest is Hottest

Chapters 13 & 14

1. Is it possible to dress trendy, but not trashy? To be both modern and modest?
2. Are there any “Modesty Tips” that Shelley shared that you feel God would like you to work on? What solutions could you try?
3. How about swimwear? Do you think God cares about what we wear swimming?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Ephesians 5:3, Matthew 5:28, and Luke 17:1-3 (you can look them up in your Bible, or in chapter 14 in your book). Discuss how those verses relate to what we wear.
5. Why do you think it’s important to dress modestly? Where does modesty start?
6. Do you have a gift or talent that displays your inner beauty?

Reflection: This week, every time you get dressed, ask yourself: “What does God think of this outfit?” and “How am I presenting myself to others?”

Journal: Take the time to write out why modesty is important. Also write down how you think you are doing in the area of modest and any changes you think you need to make.

Read: Chapters 15 & 16 before the next session.

Session Seven

Boy Crazy

Chapters 15 & 16

1. Do you believe that flirting is just innocent fun, or do you see how it could be dangerous?
2. What advice or instruction have you had in the area of sex and dating, and who did it come from?
3. Read Song of Songs 2:7. What are some ways we might “arouse or awaken love?”
4. What are some characteristics of the love God wants us to share with others? (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-8)
5. Do you see how Heather easily got caught up in the fun vs. forever mindset? How can we avoid that in our own lives?

Reflection: What are your motives when it comes to dating (or wanting to date someone)? Are you running on feelings? Are you being selfish? Do you think God would want you to change your perspective when it comes to guys? If so, how?

Journal: Write out ways you can take advantage of the gift of singleness.

Read: Chapters 17 & 18 before the next session.

Session Eight

Guys vs. Girls

Chapters 17 & 18

1. Have you ever felt depressed after a break up? If so, why do you think you felt that way?
2. What are some ways we can guard our hearts in relationships?
3. What are some consequences of not keeping the “fire” of our sexual passion inside the “fireplace” of marriage?
4. What are some practical ways you can honor God when it comes to romance and dating? How can you protect your purity and reserve intimacy for marriage?
5. Read Ephesians 6:10-18 where it talks about the armor of God. How can those verses help us keep from going too far with guys?

Reflection: Where do you draw the line when it comes to sex and sexuality? Do you need to back up and ask for forgiveness?

Journal: Write a letter to your future husband. You can tell him anything from your hopes and dreams, to what you are learning about purity, relationships, and beauty.

Read: Chapters 19, 20 & 21 before the next session.

Session Nine

When Sex Isn't Sexy

Chapters 19, 20 & 21

1. Do you see how there can be a link between sex and depression?
2. Would you know if you were sexually abused? Did any of the definitions of sexual abuse surprise you?
3. Read James 1:4-5 and discuss the process of sin. Is it the temptation that's wrong? If you are willing, share how you have seen this process work in your life.
4. Is it hard for you to believe that God loves everyone, including drug addicts, murders, homosexuals, cheaters, anorexics, etc.? Why or why not?
5. How does God's view of homosexuality differ from that of the culture?
6. How do you think God wants us to respond to homosexuals?

Reflection / Journal: If any of the topics from today's session touched a chord with you, journal about what it was and why. If you have trouble thinking of something, write about one way your life has been touched by one of those three topics. It could be something personal, or something a friend or family member has gone through.

Read: Chapters 22 & 23 before the next session.

Session Ten

Find Your True Beauty

Chapters 22 & 23

1. When do you feel closest to God?
2. What are some of the things we choose to do instead of connecting with God?
3. Do you see the importance when it comes to spending time with God every day?
4. Read Psalm 42:1-2. Do you thirst for God? If not, what might be the cause?
5. What are some examples of wrong paths we can go down in life? Paths that might not seem bad, but won't lead us toward becoming godly women with true beauty?
6. At the end of Julie's story, she discovered that we are all different, and that's the way God intended us to be. How are you different? Do you see your difference as a bad thing, or have you accepted it as God's design?

Reflection: Are there any course corrections you need to make in your life?

Journal: Write a letter to God, letting Him know your favorite way to spend time with Him. Or what's been keeping you from spending time with Him.

Read: Chapters 24 & 25 before the next session.

Just for Fun: If you had a security blanket, or favorite animal from when you were younger, bring it to the next session.

Session Eleven

The Beauty of Hope

Chapters 24 & 25

1. Have you ever felt brokenhearted? Write or share aloud one word describing the cause of your broken heart (divorce, breakup, loneliness, rejection, abuse, etc.)
2. In chapter 24, Shelley mentioned five things that helped her heal her broken heart, what were they? (See the section titled “What Helped Me.”)
3. What are the three parts of the forgiveness cross?
4. Read Ephesians 4:31 and identify the six things God wants us to get rid of, and discuss how unforgiveness can cause those things.
5. Share a memory you have about the security blanket, animal, or item you brought today. If you didn't bring one, but still have a memory you can share, feel free to do so. Do you believe that God loves you more than you used to love that toy or blanket? That there is nothing you could do and nothing could be done to you that would ever change His love for you? Why or why not?

Reflection: Are there any “clogs” separating you from God? Where do you need to apply God’s “Drano” of forgiveness?

Journal: Write down how you think God sees you or feels about you.

Read: Chapter 26 before the final session.

Session Twelve

You Are Beautiful

Chapter 26

1. How does the world define beauty? What are some of the ways believing the world's definition of beauty can influence us or harm us?
2. How does God define beauty? What does knowing God's definition of beauty teach us?
3. Looking back over this book, what is one thing that has surprised, influenced, or helped you the most?
4. In what ways could you relate to the "Who Am I" poem at the end of the book?
5. Read Romans 12:2 and discuss how you can transform your mind when it comes to beauty.

About the Authors



Shelley Hitz is an award-winning and international best-selling author. However, most importantly she is a wife, daughter, sister, friend and follower of Christ. She has a heart for teen girls that began from her own journey of finding her true beauty in Christ. Shelley is currently ministering to Christian entrepreneurs (pastors, authors, speakers, business owners) who want to keep Christ at the center of their lives and business.



Heather Hart is first and foremost a servant of Christ who is happily married to the man of her dreams—but she's also the mother of four and an internationally best-selling and award-winning author. She doesn't have it all together, but she's okay with that because she knows Christ has her covered when she fails. Her hope that is while she is struggling through this thing called life, she is pointing others towards Jesus along the way.

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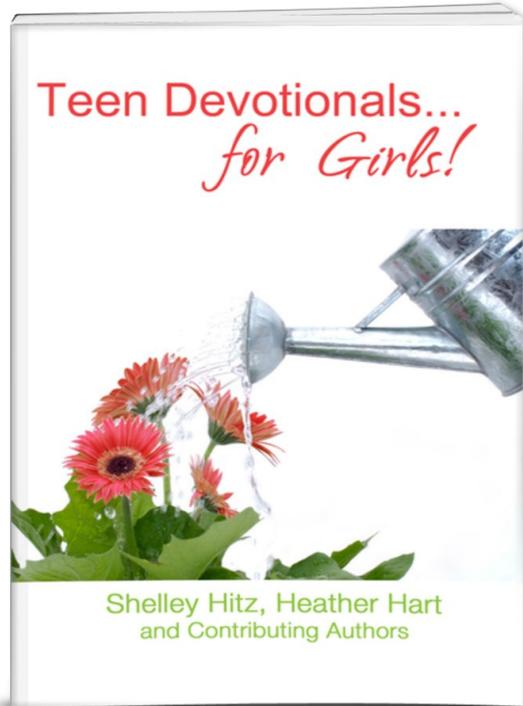
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