

Seeing through the Lies: Unmasking the Myths Women Believe

By

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Note from the Author

Thank you for your desire to grow closer to God through the words of this book. But please understand, no human words can compare to your own personal study and meditation of God's Word. As you go through each chapter, I encourage you to read and internalize the suggested Bible readings; individually meditate on the specific words of Jesus and seek His instruction to you; and then use your group time to discuss the questions and encourage one another in love.

I hope you'll use a notebook or journal to write your own personal reflections and messages from the Father. I promise that the words you write today will help comfort, strengthen, and guide you in the years to come.

Sisters, the only truth we can count on is the truth of God's Word. We'll have lots of fun going through this study together, but believe me, it won't be easy. It will require that we peel away the layers of protection and deceit, and face reality. And sometimes that's a painful process. Thank you for bravely taking this journey with me.

Now, let's go forth, expose the masks, and seek His truth together!

Chapter 1

A Half-Truth is a Whole Lie

*Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long. Psalm 25:5*

The half-truth has been around since Satan and Eve met for lunch in the garden. And it wasn't the snake who first danced around the truth. It was Eve. Sweet, innocent Eve. The crown of creation; the helpmate of all mankind. (At least all mankind of that day!)

It's not that she really *lied* or anything. She just kinda stretched the truth. Made it a little more exciting. After all, a great story must have a WOW factor. And the fact that God said not to eat the fruit just wasn't WOW enough. So she invented another rule: they couldn't touch the fruit, either.

Minor point. Major problem.

In the time it took Eve to invent her story, she was seduced into the world of half-truths, and wouldn't have recognized reality if it slithered up and bit her on the big toe.

It must run in the family.

The Queen of Half-Truths

Eve and I are sisters. She started the half-truth way back there in the garden and I've done my part to continue it. As a matter of fact, there was a time in my life when I was the queen of half-truths. And it all started when I was nine years old.

As a creative little girl growing up on the poor side of a South Carolina town, I discovered that an impressive half-truth was often preferable to a boring whole truth. Like the time my mother took the four of us kids and moved away, leaving my daddy behind. I didn't understand the intricacies of such a move, or the pain that led to it. All I knew was that I missed my daddy and I would do anything to make him—and me—look good.

Standing in the lunch line at the new school, I couldn't help but compare my faded hand-me-downs to the bright, trendy wardrobes of my peers. I listened in as the girls discussed their latest fashion purchases and planned what they would wear the next day.

My hopes for acceptance plummeted. As one whose second-hand wardrobe had been delivered in a tattered Kash-and-Karry grocery bag, I couldn't imagine actually *shopping* for clothes. My experience with purchasing new items was limited to necessities, like economy-sized boxes of off-brand cereal and generic toilet paper the consistency of cardboard. I could see this was going to take some major damage control. I needed a WOW factor.

Snaking my way into the circle, I announced, "My dad's in the oil business."

Silence.

I forced a casual smile, as if shopping sprees and fashion plates were a routine part of my day. Sophistication oozed from my pores.

Betty, the leader, scanned the group, searching for the alien who had insinuated herself into the inner sanctum. Her radar eyes locked in on me; her aloof once-over speaking volumes. “Really?”

“Yes. And I used to live near Paris, too.”

To this day, I have no idea where those words came from. I just opened my mouth and out they came. Big, fat, ugly lies.

But wait! I thought. *Maybe they weren't really lies!* After all, my daddy *did* drive a heating oil truck. And I *did* live near Paris Mountain at the foot of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

My affinity for the half-truth was born that monumental day. It didn't take me long to learn that a plausible half-truth was often more exciting than an ineffective whole truth—and the payoff was much greater!

My newly discovered system of partial truth was a boon to my less-than-ideal existence. Honesty—once the goal of good girls like me—was now conveniently dismissed to the back burner of relativity. And guilt—the bane of all us good girls—was now eliminated by the credible half of half-truths. It was a liberating discovery!

But unmerited liberty comes with a price.

My parents' differences were soon mended and we started a new life in a new town. Friends came easily and I found myself less dependent on the half-truth. But one bright Sunday afternoon my parents announced they were going to take a nap, giving us kids strict orders to stay inside and watch TV. (This was back when flipping through channels wasn't tantamount to strolling through a morality minefield. It also required you

to actually get up from the sofa and walk across the room in order to select one of the three stations.)

Being the uninformed ten-year-old that I was, I assumed my parents' need for a nap meant they needed sleep. And—as an astute observer of my daddy's sleep habits—I was sure I could use it to my advantage.

I ran to my friend's house and challenged her to a game of Monopoly. Before the afternoon was over, I was the undisputed champion, reveling in all my board game glory.

Ten minutes later, standing before judge and jury, I was fighting for my life.

My plan had been simple enough. All I had to say was, "I came into the bedroom while you were sleeping because I wanted to ask Daddy if I could go to Lynn's house." Half-truth. I *did* want to ask Daddy if I could go to Lynn's house.

"Maybe he just doesn't remember. Maybe he wasn't really awake." Another half-truth. My daddy had been known to carry on conversations in his sleep and have absolutely no memory of it when he woke up.

Two half-truths. And everybody knows two halves equal a whole—right?

Wrong.

There was one little problem. The bedroom door had been locked.

That was the day I discovered that a half-truth is a whole lie. (Years later, I developed my own affinity for the half-truth of Sunday afternoon "naps." With the door locked.)

(Sidebar: After all, what is a lie? 'Tis but the truth in masquerade. Lord Byron¹)

Reality is, truth matters. It matters in life, and love, and business. It matters in issues of right and wrong, in success and failure, in living for Christ and living for the world.

It matters so much that Americans spend millions of dollars a year in their efforts to discover it. And truth can be found everywhere. With god-like authority, TV talk show hosts tout their revelation to an audience hungry for a WOW factor . . . for enlightenment . . . for something of substance. News channels feed our insatiable need to know, while self-proclaimed experts offer their own inside track to truth.

But the world's message is watered down, reformulated, and infused with false expectations. Individual truth is relative, leading everybody and his relative to promote a new truth!

But where is reality in the midst of all this insight and enlightenment? It is sadly missing, hidden behind the mask of Satan's lies.

Real truth once carried weight. It was timeless, undeniable, and saturated with authority:

God is Creator.

Sin is wrong.

Salvation is free.

But today's truth is a lie. And it's spreading—even to the Christian community.

You're not good enough.

You're not important enough.

You're not beautiful enough.

The fact is, those statements are merely half-truths. Yes, the Bible is clear that we can't be good enough or important enough or beautiful enough to reach God. But He doesn't leave us there. And that's what the world has failed to tell us. That's what Satan doesn't want us to know.

Ladies, we've bought into half-truth, and consequently, we believe a lie. Isaiah described a similar condition, 700 years before Jesus was born:

Truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found Isaiah 59: 14b-15a

Reality is, God's Word holds the only truth.

So Which Mask Conceals the Truth from You?

Is it intellect? Technology? The culture? Your church?

Is it your own expectations as a Christian woman?

There are many answers to that question. But they all confirm one thing: half-truths and whole lies lead us to fool ourselves with the mask of false reality. And whether the lie is positive or negative, the results are the same:

We're deceived.

We're deceived into thinking we're good enough . . . or we're too far gone.

That we can do it all . . . or we can't do anything right.

That we deserve all good things . . . or we deserve nothing.

And the common result of this deception is disappointment. Disappointment in our lives . . . ourselves . . . our husbands . . . our families . . . our churches . . . and our God.

Who said money can't buy happiness? Why can't good mothers always have good children? When will this Christian life get easier?

Some are so disappointed, they've even abandoned the faith.

Oh, how we've been deceived!

We serve a God Who loves us unconditionally, Who is all-powerful, Who wants only the best for us, and yet we're often disappointed—because we fail to understand His greatness.

Sisters, we can't grasp truth by listening to the world and its lies! In John 8:44, Jesus tells us that Satan is the father of lies; that there is no truth in him. Who are you going to believe? The One Who loves us and died for us, or the one who wants to steal, kill, and destroy our lives?

But let me warn you—seeking God in our own strength will be equally disappointing. In Romans 7, Paul brings to light the very words we often keep hidden inside.

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature What a wretched man (woman) I am!

Did you get that? Paul struggled! He struggled, too! He struggled with the same reality we do. The reality that we can't measure up. That we can't be all we want to be. That we can't even be all God *allows* us to be.

But His Word tells us He loves us anyway. His Word tells us He knows we will struggle. But He has the answers. And His answers are true.

(Sidebar: A lie will go around the world while truth is pulling its boots on. Rev. Charles Spurgeon²)

Are You Ready to Face the Struggles?

So, girlfriends, tell the truth. Are you disappointed? Are you tired of living the lies? (My guess is that you are, or you wouldn't be reading this book!)

Has your life been one masquerade after another—seeing through one lie, only to be deceived by the next?

If so, then answer me this: Are you ready to get down to the nitty-gritty? Are you ready to face the good, the bad, and the ugly truth about reality?

Perhaps I should put a disclaimer here: Some truth about reality may be hard to face. It sure was for me. I'm going to be honest and share some of the struggles I've had and some of the lessons I've learned. And sometimes I'll share the lessons I'm STILL trying to learn!

But I promise you this (Do you see I've raised my right hand?):

I promise to tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—so help me God!

Jesus tells us in John 8:31-32 that if we hold to His teaching, we can know the truth, and His truth is the only one that can set us free. My prayer is that through the stories, the steps, and the study of Scripture, you'll be better equipped to recognize the lies that bind you . . . and the keys that set you free.

Yep, I'm going to tell you the truth about lies.

God's Revealing Truth:

Day One: Psalm 119:1-16

Day Two: Genesis 3

Day Three: Matthew 4:1-11

Day Four: John 8

Day Five: Luke 4:14-21

In His Own Words:

1. Read John 3:20-21. According to Jesus, what happens when we live by the truth?
2. Spend time in prayer, asking the Father to work through this study and expose the masks Satan uses to deceive you.

Chapter 2

Beauty and the Book

“The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” I Samuel 16:7b

As a bona fide, card-carrying daddy’s girl, I grew up feeling beautiful. It didn’t matter if I sported blue-ribboned ponytails or a wet head full of bright pink curlers, Daddy never missed an opportunity to pull me onto his lap, wrap his arms around me, and tell me I was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen. But my daddy did a real disservice to me. He failed to inform me that I wasn’t the apple of *everyone’s* eye!

I still can’t believe I didn’t make cheerleader. And how dare Barry Hammond dump me? And I don’t think I’ll ever get over the fact that I wasn’t even nominated for student body president!

How could that happen? Didn’t Daddy say I was beautiful?

Everybody knew the beautiful girls were the cheerleaders and the student body presidents. And beautiful girls didn’t get dumped—they did the dumping!

My mother didn’t help any. Would you believe she wouldn’t let me shave my legs? Now, for some of you blondies out there with that microscopic peach fuzz growing

on your legs, not being able to shave wouldn't be such a big deal. You could go your entire life without shaving and no one would ever even notice.

Me? I had the legs of a gorilla!

And the really weird thing was, Mother didn't say I couldn't wear hose.

Oh, by the way, back then, that didn't mean wearing pantyhose. No, if you wanted to wear hose when I was a teenager, you had to stuff your body into this little bitty contraption about the size of a potholder—it was called a girdle. And it didn't matter if you were skinny or fat; it didn't matter if you were going to the store or to church or out on a date, you forced yourself into this rubberized torture chamber and prayed for enough oxygen to sustain life.

So, like every other teenage girl of that day, I sacrificed comfort for beauty in order to win my man. But I soon realized the price of beauty wasn't worth it. After suffering the unbelievable girdle torture, I discovered this universal truth: If there's anything worse than gorilla legs, it's gorilla legs in hose! (To this day, I'm confident that's the reason I didn't make cheerleader. And it's all my mother's fault.)

But, like many other red-blooded American girls, I took matters into my own hands and shaved my legs anyway. Of course, my mother found out, and I got into big trouble.

You know, I never figured out exactly what gave it away: the long black hairs in my daddy's razor . . . or the blood transfusion!

But one thing was for certain—you can't un-shave legs!

So with shaved legs covered in white dots of toilet paper and stuffed into hose, I set out to get beautiful and find my man!

Beauty and Popularity—A Family Affair

Erma Bombeck once said her family was “a strange little band of characters trudging through life, sharing diseases and toothpaste.”¹ Someone else compared families to fudge . . . “mostly sweet, with a few nuts thrown in.”² Well, between the nuts, the characters, and the diseases, my pathway to dating bliss did not come easy. Besides the exercises to increase my bust and the workout to decrease my hips, the quest to find the man of my dreams was often complicated by another problem: my parents didn’t see the wisdom of having only one child—me. As the oldest of four, I continually suffered the embarrassment and anxiety that only younger siblings can bring to the dating environment. Probing questions such as, “Are you going to kiss my sister?” were often followed by the release of highly personal medical information such as, “She’ll be ready as soon as she pops that zit on the end of her nose.”

But my brother and sisters weren’t the only family members sabotaging my dating efforts. Between my daddy’s year-long reign as Miss Carolina Bowler (don’t ask) and my mother’s attempt at playing church basketball, it’s a wonder I ever had a boyfriend.

Yes, you could say my family complicated my teenage years.

For most of us girls, this search for beauty and acceptance begins on the playground and takes over as we approach adolescence. Between the pressure to be beautiful and the drive to be popular, it’s a miracle any of us survive to adulthood!

But once we’re of legal age, we finally get our acts together and realize beauty isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, right?

I wish.

For most of us, it doesn't matter how old we are, we're still striving to achieve the world's current definition of beauty. But the world's definition is a lie. A lie that says beauty is skinny, beauty is perfection, but more than anything else—beauty is young.

A Losing Battle

I remember the first time I realized I was losing my youthful edge. As a conservative young wife and mother, I was relatively content. After all, Daddy said I was beautiful, and my husband, Gary, seemed okay with my efforts.

But then that fateful day came. I was stopped at a red light while driving my daughter, Christina, to cheerleader practice when I noticed a nice young man in the car left of me. (Yes, even though *I* wasn't good enough to make cheerleader, I was good enough to drive my offspring to *her* cheerleader practice. Oh, the irony of it all!)

Anyway, the gentleman was looking my way. Of course, I didn't look at him. I mean, how tacky would THAT be? But I could feel his stares.

I've still got it. Even after all these years, I've still got it.

I smiled and turned toward Christina, seated in the passenger's seat. She was smiling, too. Life was good.

She waved.

I waved back.

Her rolling eyes broke my reverie. Her hand motions signaled my foolishness.

I followed her eyes—past me and straight to the young man in the car next door.

He waved at Christina.

That's when reality hit.

My quest for beauty was kicked up a notch that day.

I know, I know—it's awful that I even cared whether a stranger thought I looked good or not. And I hate to admit it, but even now, as a grandmother of four, I still want people to think I'm beautiful. That's one of the reasons I try to take care of myself and do the best I can with what I have. But—being a grandmother of four—I'm often reminded of what little I have to work with.

A few years ago, my granddaughter, Ellie, and I were passing the time on a family road trip by playing one of our favorite travel games, I Spy. It was Ellie's turn and she had me searching high and low for something purple, our favorite color. It wasn't the beach towel, the flower on her shirt, or her purple nail polish. I had a good view of the entire van from my back seat location, but it wasn't helping. What else could it possibly be?

"You'll never guess this one," the seven-year-old announced. That was all I needed to hear. Zooming down the highway at 70 miles per hour, my competitive streak went into overdrive.

But there was nothing purple left in the car. "Are you sure you mean purple?" I asked, eyeing Christina's sweater. "Could it be pink?"

"No, MaMa, it's purple. I promise." She crossed her arms. "You might as well give up. You'll never guess it."

"You know me better than that." I crossed my own arms. "I never give up!"

Five minutes later, I gave up. "Okay, what is it?"

She pointed. I leaned over and scanned the floorboard. "There's nothing purple down there."

"Not there," she said, pointing again. "There."

I followed her pointing finger straight to my leg. My spider-veined leg.

Purple is no longer my favorite color.

(Sidebar: “Thank you, dear Lord, that wrinkles don’t HURT!” Barbara Johnson³)

Spider Veins and the Web of Deceit

Yes, after thirty-eight years of marriage, it’s getting harder and harder to work with what I’ve got. And I can promise you this: it doesn’t matter how hard I work, between the spider veins and the cellulite, your chances of seeing me in a bathing suit are about as good as my chances of being the next Miss America.

Of course, with a whole lot of money and a love affair with pain, I could get my spider veins and cellulite taken care of. And I wouldn’t be alone.

According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, there were more than 11 million cosmetic procedures performed in 2005. Eleven million! That’s a 444 percent increase since 1997! And statistics show Americans spent \$12.4 billion (yes, that’s BILLION) in 2005 alone, with women accounting for 91.4 percent of the procedures.⁴

Wow. Twelve billion. That’s a lot of dollars. And although some of those procedures are for breast reconstruction after mastectomies or scar repair after accidents or skin removal after serious weight loss, most of the money is spent simply because we’re trying to look younger, sexier, or more beautiful.

Want to have the perfect rear end? There are doctors who will try. Want lips that look like they were kissed by bees? No problem. For the mere price of a college degree, you can strive for perfection.

But unlike the sheepskin hanging on your wall, this expense sheet is only temporary. After a while, reality takes over again, and the look isn't as good as it used to be. But not to worry! Another round of pain and money, and you're back in the game.

And a game it is. A game that never ends. Because regardless of how well the surgery goes, time is still the enemy of earthly beauty. Lifted faces eventually droop. Pouty lips eventually scowl. And the current definition of beauty is ever changing.

So we do it again. Or we add another procedure.

But we're never satisfied.

(Sidebar: [Beaches are] infested with women from the current *Sports Illustrated* swimwear edition. I have cooked bigger turkeys than most of them. Erma Bombeck⁵)

Believe me, I'm not above it all. I have to admit, if I had the money and the nerve, there are days I might be tempted to have surgery. But between a husband who watches pennies and my own aversion to pain, I don't think I'll ever go under the knife simply for the sake of beauty alone. But that doesn't mean I don't want to look good. It's just that my efforts at beauty usually lie in the eternal search for flawless make-up, classy clothes, stylish hair, or cute shoes. But the motivation is the same—I want you to think I'm beautiful.

So what's your ticket to glamour? Whether it's over-exercising, extreme dieting, plastic surgery, or suntanning, most of us are caught up in the quest for beauty to one degree or another. It's just that some of us are caught up at a higher financial and medical risk tolerance than others.

But regardless of our commitment level, none of us will ever be beautiful enough to satisfy the world. And because our culture and its web of deceit are never satisfied with us, we're never satisfied with ourselves.

Because we've been sold a lie. A lie that says if we're not beautiful or young or sexy, then we're not worthy.

And I can't help but ask, worthy of what?

The truth is, the world uses beauty, youth, and sex as marketing tools to sell everything from cars to cameras to furniture. And, for the life of me, I can't understand it. I mean, can you explain to me what a sexy car is? After all, I've been around a while, and I've seen a lot of things I never thought I'd see, but I can promise you, I've never seen a car fall in love, get married, and have babies! Cars are nothing but gears and paint and metal and wheels and seats and radios—how in the world can they be sexy?

But they are . . . because the culture says they are. It's all in the marketing.

And we're falling for it. We're falling for the airbrushed lie that says we must look a certain way and talk a certain way and dress a certain way, or we're not worthy.

That's not what the Bible says.

The Unmasking

The Bible tells many stories of women who were chosen because of their beauty. In an effort to be selected as the next queen, Esther and other young virgins were pampered and primped for over a year. Bathsheba, possibly through no fault of her own, was taken by David, simply because he desired her beauty. Jacob preferred Rachel over Leah because she was lovely.

But none of these stories can match the description Solomon detailed in His book, Song of Solomon. With the skill of an artist, this king created a verbal picture of his dream girl, his Beloved. And for centuries, readers have tried to imagine her beauty.

Well, imagine no more, because TA-DA! . . . I just happen to have one of the few pictures known to exist! Following the description detailed in Song of Solomon, my friend, Genie Mahaffey, has created a portrait of Solomon's Woman. And since you're my girlfriends, I'll share it with you. But it's our secret, okay?

Are you ready?

Solomon says:

How beautiful you are my darling! Oh, how beautiful!

1. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead.
2. Your graceful legs are like jewels.
3. Your waist is a mound of wheat encircled by lilies.
4. Your navel is a rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine.
5. Your neck is like the Tower of David, built with elegance; on it hang a thousand shields.
6. Your two breasts are like two fawns that browse among the lilies. (Remember, I didn't say this, Solomon did!)
7. Your eyes are doves and the pools of Heshbon.
8. Your temples are like the halves of a pomegranate.
9. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep, just shorn, coming up from the washing.
10. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, looking toward Damascus.
11. And all this is behind the veil.

How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love with your delights.⁶

(Author's note: Artist rendering included.⁷)

Whew! That Beloved was some kinda woman, huh? Can you say, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder?"

More than Skin Deep

But Rebekah's beauty was different.

Abraham was finally ready to find a wife for his son, Isaac. And, as an almost forty-year-old, Isaac was probably more than ready! Decades before, Abraham had followed God's command to leave his country and travel ". . . *to the land I will show you.*" *Genesis 12:1.* His journey took him to Canaan, about 400 miles from home.

But when it came time to find a wife for Isaac, Abraham knew his daughter-in-law would not be found among the Canaanites, so the Father of Many Nations called his chief servant and announced his plan. "*Go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac.*" *Genesis 24:4.*

This wouldn't be a quick trip across town.

There is no indication that the servant believed in the God of Abraham. As a matter of fact, the Bible says that when the servant arrived at his destination, he prayed, "*O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today and show kindness to my master Abraham.*" *Genesis 24:12* (Emphasis mine.) Although the servant seemed unsure of his own relationship with God, he proved his confidence in the God of Abraham by asking for a sign.

"*May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels, too'—let her be the one you*

have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.” Genesis 24:14.

Notice the servant didn't ask that the girl be beautiful or sexy or young. He asked that she have a servant's heart. He asked that her inner beauty shine through, confirming her as the chosen one for Isaac. And that's exactly what happened.

The Bible tells us that before the servant finished praying, Rebekah appeared with her water jar. Right on time. Exactly as requested.

I've heard this story since I was a little girl. But until I took a crash course in camel-watering, I had no idea what Rebekah had signed up for. Ladies, this was not a quick trip to the refrigerator door for ice water!

We know from Scripture the servant had taken ten camels on this journey; watering them was a major undertaking. Would you believe a camel can lap up to twenty-one gallons of water in ten minutes? Multiply that by ten camels, and you get a glimpse of Rebekah's sacrifice. Two hundreds gallons is a lot of water for anyone to draw, but this young maiden was willing to do it, even though it could take hours.⁸

And that's what Abraham's servant needed to see.

There is no doubt that Rebekah was beautiful. The Bible tells us unequivocally that she was. But it wasn't her beauty that labeled her. It was her heart. The servant had requested an unlikely sign, and Rebekah had passed with flying colors. Although she was pleasing to look at, it was her inner beauty—her heart—that drew her and set her apart as the mother of Israel.

God's message is clear: He wants us to have a servant's heart. Yes, Rebekah was beautiful to look at, but more importantly, she had an inner beauty that can only come from a heart like His.

Our Inner Beauty Make-Over

So, how do we develop the inner beauty God is looking for? I Peter 3:3-4 says, *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, 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.*

I'll talk about this verse in more detail in Chapter Seven, but let me just share something here. The first time I seriously read that passage, I thought I was going to croak. (Actually, I thought I was going to throw up, but that's not something I can say here.) A gentle and quiet spirit? Was God really talking to me?

My natural self is anything but gentle and quiet. For me, excitable and loud is probably more like it. But excitable and loud aren't high on God's priority list. And neither is lovely, or shapely, or young. Truth is, those words hold absolutely no value as far as God is concerned. That doesn't mean we have to ignore our appearance. It simply means God isn't impressed with our outward beauty.

But a gentle and quiet spirit? A pure heart? Now, that's the beauty God is looking for. And that's a beauty we can all have. But be prepared. This beauty doesn't come without a price. It takes sacrifice, and it may require some pain. But the rewards are eternal, and they can satisfy for life.

So how do we develop this beauty that satisfies? Here are five steps to starting our internal make-over.

1. Set aside time for a daily inner beauty regimen. In this world of Daytimers, demanding jobs, and divergent families, it can be hard to develop an inner beauty ritual. We've already established the importance of inner beauty over outer beauty, but is it evidenced by our schedules? How much time do we spend on make up, hair styling, and primping? What about nails and facial treatments? We need to make it a goal to spend at least that much time in daily prayer and Bible study. Don't have that much time every day? Then honestly give Him what you do have and trust Him to increase it. In her book, *Balance That Works When Life Doesn't*, author Susie Larson shares a period in her life when she was very ill and had three small sons to care for. Simply surviving the day took major effort, but more than anything else, she desired quality time with the Lord. Larson says:

I went to the Lord regularly and passionately appealed to Him, "You are capable of moving heaven and earth for Your children. I want time with You. You want time with me. Your Word promises that when I ask for something in accordance with Your will, I can be sure that I'll receive it. I will spend my pitiful ten minutes doing devotions since that's all the quiet time available for me right now. I will show up for my quiet times and consider them a 'tithing of the time.' I trust that as I give you my few minutes, You'll see me as You did the boy on the hillside who gave You his lunch. You multiplied his gift beyond belief! I trust You to multiply my devotional time beyond belief. I want to walk closely with You—You want this for me too. I will watch and see what You will do." ⁹

She goes on to tell of the miraculous transformation in her boys. “Now I will confess, I did sort of tell them that unless they were hemorrhaging, they needed to play nicely until I was done praying, but they got used to the priority of my prayer time.”¹⁰

What’s consuming God’s time at your house? Is it laundry? Over-commitment? Maybe it’s those things you simply enjoy, like television and recreational reading.

I have to admit, for me it’s email. Every morning is like Christmas! I wake up and immediately wonder what great gifts of communication are waiting in my inbox. I realize this should not be my first priority, so I make deals with God: “Okay, Lord, I’ll just check my mail and see if there’s anything urgent that needs an immediate reply. Those are the only ones I’ll look at, I promise. I mean, what if an editor has an amazing assignment for me and she needs an answer within two hours or it goes to someone else?” (Now, the fact that I didn’t go to bed until midnight and it’s now 4:30 am doesn’t seem to affect my reasoning. I know editors work hard, but I doubt many are sending emails at 1:00 am, expecting an answer within two hours!)

Well, you know what happens. There isn’t a letter from an editor demanding an urgent response, but there is a note from the new friend I met at in New Mexico, and we have some really, really important things to talk about!

And God’s time gets put on the back burner. Again. All because I believe the lie that says I don’t have time for Bible study; I don’t have time for God.

Daily beauty care, family responsibilities, television, reading, and email are not bad things. But are they taking time that belongs to God? We can never be beautiful in the way God wants us to be until we give Him what He wants and deserves—time with Him. Let’s commit to God—and each other—that we’ll make His time a priority. When

we put His time first, we'll begin the process of developing the inner beauty God found in Rebekah.

(Sidebar: The winds of God are always blowing, but you must set the sails. Unknown¹¹)

2. Worship at the inner beauty shop. Most of us probably spend time each week at church. We gather our families, our offering, and our Bibles and head for our appointment (sometimes we're even on time!). But what do we do once we get there? Is it simply a tradition? Another thing we can cross off our "To Do" list? A commitment we can't postpone?

God tells us that one of the reasons we're to attend church is to worship Him. Worship should be our human response to His power, position, and love. And when we truly understand that power, position, and love, we can't help but worship Him.

But instead of heartfelt adoration, our churches are often simply places of tradition, repetition, and empty words. We're too dignified to honor an awesome God. And yet, His Word tells us that if we keep silent, the rocks will cry out in praise (Luke 19:40).

In her book, *Running Barefoot on Holy Ground*, Jeanne Gowen Dennis addresses our struggle to let go and honestly worship the Creator:

Why don't I shout God's praises from my rooftop? . . . We could praise Him out loud. We could help others see His majesty through our eyes. . . . Oh, to be able to release our inhibitions to the wind and praise Him with every breath, every inclination of soul, every tremor of spirit! . . . I used to imagine Jesus greeting me at the Pearly Gates with a nice warm hug. But the more I know about God, the

more I think that when I face my Creator, I will feel compelled to fall down in worship with a mixture of terror, ecstasy, gratitude, and love.¹²

Does your inner beauty make-over include learning to truly worship? Yes, we come from differing backgrounds and personalities and denominations, but that doesn't eliminate our responsibility to engage in real worship of a Holy God. The Psalms tell us over and over that we are to praise Him; that He expects and enjoys our adoration. David writes of many ways we can honor Him—through shouts of praise, through music, through dancing, through prayer. And yet, if we're honest, we have to admit that we're often sitting in our pews, eyes focused ahead . . . and planning what we'll have for dinner.

Oh, how this must break His heart!

Sisters, let's make our churches—and more importantly, our hearts—places of true worship. Let's leave behind tradition and detachment and apathy, and grab hold of the beauty God sees in adoration and gratitude and praise.

God is God. Don't let the rocks cry out in your place.

3. Share your beauty secrets. I remember when God first called me to begin my speaking ministry to women. It was not a call I wanted to hear.

“But I don't do women,” I explained to God. “I work with kids, remember?”

(Prior to that time, I had said I would *never* work with women, and I couldn't understand why in the world anyone else would want to, either! Which just goes to show that you should never say never, especially to God—unless you want Him to use that very issue to teach you a lesson.)

I calmly explained to God that kids don't care about how you look or what you wear or whether you set a lovely table. They don't care if your nail polish is chipped or if

the skunk line is showing in your hair. All they want to know is, “Do you care about me?”

I cared about kids, and they knew it. Wasn't that enough for God?

It wasn't enough.

As one who had been married to the same man for twenty-eight years, I had a reputation to uphold. But God wanted me to come clean. He wanted me to confess my failures and continued insecurities to women. And not just to any women, but to the women of my church.

He was asking a lot.

It all started when I read Titus 2. Let me just say right here and now, if you don't want the women at church to know your secrets, don't read Titus 2:

. . . Teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to too much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Titus 2:3-5

According to Titus 2, I was chosen to reveal my life lessons simply because I avoided gossip, I wasn't a drunk, and I was old. Not quite my idea of a stellar resume. Of course, my experience as a domineering wife, overbearing mother, and big mouth know-it-all made me the perfect candidate for the job.

I was hired.

Regardless of where you are on this pathway of life, if you're a daughter of the King, fervently trying to live a life that honors Him and His Word, chances are, you have something of value to share.

So, what life lessons have you learned that could benefit other women? What secrets could encourage others—those personal experiences that hide behind the mask of reputation and upright standing? Yes, we need to be careful that our stories and experiences glorify the Father and His power, rather than Satan and his lies. But what better way to share the message than to be like the woman at the well and declare, *“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did”* (John 4:29) or like the blind man who proclaimed, *“One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”* (John 9:25)

What inner beauty secret does He want you to share with those who are younger in Christ? With those who are behind you on this path of Christian living? With those who are struggling in their walk? With those who don't even know where the path begins?

We must be willing to take off the mask and share our experiences of forgiveness and grace. Others could learn from—and be encouraged by—our beauty.

4. Adorn yourself with beautiful fruit. We women love accessories. We love the way they complement our personalities and complete our outfits. Accessories tell the world about us: “My style is classic.” “I'm quiet and demure.” “I'm an original.”

But sometimes accessories tell a different story. The colors don't go together, the piece is too big or too small, the style sends the wrong message.

In Galatians 5, Paul says we identify ourselves to the world by how we live, whether in the sinful nature or the nature of the Holy Spirit. The evidence of that nature is

like wearing accessories—it completes us and confirms the message we’re portraying. What does the world see when it looks at us? Jealousy, discord, selfish ambition, and sexual immorality announce that we’re walking in the sinful nature.

But Galatians 5:22-24 says:

. . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

The Fruit of the Spirit. I’d heard that phrase all my life. I could even stand up in church and quote the verse word for word. But those who knew me could identify my accessories, and those accessories were telling a different story. They were telling of selfishness and greed and rudeness. Of pride and fear and self-centeredness. On the day I came face-to-face with the attitudes of my heart, I was shocked. I was ashamed.

Friends, the Fruit of the Spirit is not a list of nice things we should try to do. Neither is it a collection of possible gifts we may or may not have. Instead, this is God’s command to those of us who belong to Christ Jesus: to crucify the sinful nature and the evidence it produces.

Crucify is such an ugly word, but that’s exactly what we have to do. We have to kill that sinful nature with all its ugliness, and adorn ourselves with the accessories of Christ:

Love the person who lies about us.

Find joy in the midst of our overdue bills.

Claim His peace when the medical report is bad.

Be patient with the little old lady who could have made it through the yellow light.

Be kind to the neighbor whose leaves fall on our side of the fence.

Demonstrate a heart of goodness by sharing our food, our money, our time with the homeless.

Be faithful to pray for those we promised to pray for.

Let our gentleness override the temptation to scream at our kids.

Use self-control to guard our mouths from saying those words that hurt and hinder relationships.

There it is—the Fruit of the Spirit. If we adorn ourselves with it, others will be led to praise the God of our inner beauty.

(Sidebar: Beauty, unaccompanied by virtue, is as a flower without perfume. French Proverb¹³)

5. Develop beautiful feet. Romans 10:13-15 says, *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

Our inner beauty make-over is complete when we develop the beautiful feet of a messenger. We have exciting news to share! News that can change lives and change eternity.

Brittany McCombs, the 2006 valedictorian of Foothill High School in Henderson, Nevada, stepped up to the microphone to deliver her commencement address, even

though she knew she would not be allowed to complete it. As she expected, the microphone was silenced the moment she uttered the forbidden six-letter word feared by administrators: Christ. Although McComb had a GPA of 4.7 and had earned the right to address her peers, the American Civil Liberties Union advised the school to deny her that right. But she would not be deterred. She had a message of love to share.¹⁴

Brittany McComb's speech may have been silenced, but her message was loud and clear: Christ offers love and hope to a world searching for love, but giving up hope.

Brittany McComb has the beautiful feet of a messenger. Do we?

There they are—five steps to becoming the beauty God wants us to be. A beauty focused not on our shapes, but on our servanthood. Not on our faces, but on our faithfulness.

By giving of ourselves—our hearts, our minds, our strength—we can have that extraordinary beauty that catches God's eye. And we can start today.

Daddy's Girl

It doesn't matter whether you're the long-time director of your women's ministry or the newest member of His team, God's desire is for you to be a bona fide, card-carrying Daddy's girl. He wants to pull you onto his lap, wrap his arms around you, and tell you that you're the most beautiful thing He's ever seen. Because you are. He sees the beauty that no one else can see. He sees the beauty of your potential.

But God also wants you to be one of the family. And even though He Himself is perfect, His family is indeed "a strange little band of characters trudging through life," "mostly sweet, with a few nuts thrown in."

Friends, let's make a promise today to not only cultivate the inner beauty God desires to see in us, but let's search for the beauty in each other. After all, we're family, and families stick together.

God's Revealing Truth:

Day One: Psalm 119:17-32

Day Two: Genesis 2

Day Three: Psalm 47

Day Four: Galatians 5:16-26

Day Five: Psalm 139:1-16

In His Own Words:

1. Read Luke 19:28-40. According to Jesus, what will happen if the people aren't allowed to praise Him? Are the rocks crying out in your house of worship?
2. Spend time in prayer, asking the Lord to help you see yourself as He sees you.

Seeing through the Lies: Unmasking the Myths Women Believe by Vonda Skelton.

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