

“Identity Theft—Mugged by the Mirror”

What do you see when you stand in front of the mirror? When you get up first thing in the morning? What do you see? Do you like what you see? Are you thinking, “Will **they** like what they see?” What do you see? Do you see someone that’s beautiful? Someone that’s handsome? Someone to whom God says, “You know what, you are quite enough?” Do you see someone who’s made in the image of God? Or do you see someone who needs to change their image somehow? What do you see?

We all want to look good, don’t we? I mean, there’s a piece of all of us that wants to look our best, and it’s okay to look your best; but we all, to some extent, struggle with some insecurities about how we look on the outside. None of us are really exempt from that, are we? I like to think I kind of exempt and that I really don’t care; but knowing I’m going to be on this stage where you can see everything, I wrestle with that sometimes.

Our culture is so obsessed with outward appearance. We have reality shows like *Extreme Makeover*, MTV’s *I Want a Famous Face*; *Dr. 90210*. Have you seen the reality show *The Swan*, which they bill as taking ugly ducklings and they give them plastic surgery, sometimes dangerous surgeries, to turn them into beautiful swans? Then they have a beauty pageant, and the winner gets crowned ‘the fairest of them all.’ But, what happens to the woman who goes through all those surgeries and finds she’s not quite good enough to win the whole deal?

A while back I saw with my own eyes, an episode on MTV where they followed a young guy who was so obsessed with working out, with his body, that he had—I never heard of this in my life—he had calf implants. When he stood in front of the mirror at the gym, he would check out his calves and they weren’t quite keeping up with the rest of his body, so he had calf implants. It was a terribly painful procedure. He had to walk with a walker for few days. That’s just weird! It just is. And you know what? Girls thought it was, too. They followed him as he tried to pick up girls in bars. Of course he felt the need to show off his new calves. They all just kind of laughed at him. And it was so sad to watch him kind of dance by himself in the club.

We’re obsessed with the way we look, with our image; and because of it, I think we are in an identity crisis, our identities get stolen, we get mugged by the mirror. Michelle Graham has written a book targeted to women called *Wanting to Be Her*. She talks about how in 1959 a new kid on the block became the cultural icon of what the ideal woman needed to look like. Anyone have a clue who was born in 1959? Yeah, Barbie.

But listen, Barbie is an anatomical freak. I mean, if you did the math, to have legs and a body like that, you’d have to be like 7’5” tall. You’d have to have two ribs removed from each side to make sure you got that hourglass figure. She didn’t have a complexion problem, any of that kind of stuff. She was, like, the perfect woman.

Michelle Graham writes, “This is the image that has been marketed to young girls all over the world as an inspiration to womanhood, and we eat it up. Barbie has become a \$1.5 billion a year industry.”

Now don’t worry, I’m not on a Barbie-burning crusade. But Graham continues, “As I grew into adulthood, I left my Barbie behind. Unfortunately, I struggle with the belief that unless I am physically perfect, I somehow am not as valuable as everybody else. Barbie moved out, and Victoria moved in. There’s nothing quite like a glance at a Victoria’s Secret catalog to invoke a flood of insecurities and feelings of disappointment.”

Listen, we’ve been buying a lie that says looking a certain way, being attractive, means being fulfilled. It means being enough, being accepted. I’ll be admired. I’ll be respected. I’ll be loved. I’ll be significant. It means that I have great worth. Guys will want me, or girls will want me. Employers will hire me. Friends will want to be with me. Friends will want to **be** me. That lie gets reinforced in everyday life.

In the past three decades most Miss America winners have had a body mass index that lies within the range of malnutrition. The average American woman is 5’3” and weighs 152 pounds. The average model is 5’9” and weighs 109 pounds.

But you’ve got to ask: Is the image even real? And the answer is no! Professionals are paid big bucks to make stars and models look great? There is duct tape in strategic positions that you can’t see. No kidding! They paint on makeup to make it look like you’ve got a six-pack instead of a two-liter, you know. Photos get airbrushed, and the result is a completely phony image. Nobody really looks like that!

Look, most of us can’t even come close to these images. Genetically, our bodies can’t pull it off. In many cases, it wouldn’t be even healthy to try; but unfortunately, the lie gets reinforced every day, and many people, young girls especially, are literally dying to fit the image. I don’t know about you, but the whole thing sounds so—and I’m not exaggerating here—sounds so sinister to me, and it should, because it’s a lie that comes straight out of the pit of hell. It’s the plan that the enemy of our soul has had from the beginning of time to distort our image, distort the image of God, and steal our identity. Jesus called him the father of lies.

Look what Jesus said about him in John 10:10, **“The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10, NIV).**

The story of Adam and Even in the garden is a story about our human condition. It’s my story and your story. Adam and Eve are created in God’s image. God creates the earth, the creatures of the earth and human beings in his image. It says in Genesis, **“Then God looked over all that He had made, and saw that it was excellent. ‘Very good,’ He said, ‘in every way.’...” (Genesis 1:31, NLT).**

Now check out Genesis 2:25. It says, **“The man and his wife, Adam and Eve, were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25, NIV).** They’re walking with God, walking with each other; made in his image, they felt no shame. But then they buy into a lie. They’re deceived. The evil one comes into the picture and sells them a fake bill of goods.

In this story, my story, your story, they stood in that garden, that man and that woman, and they bought the lie. They looked at themselves, made in the image of God and said, “This is not enough!” [break mirror]

Their condition is our condition. We say the image of God in us is not enough and we break it. We try to recreate another image, an image of our own based on what our world says. And as we do that, it just pulls us farther and farther away from God. It pulls us further from the truth that we are loved, accepted, secure, and significant, and it makes us empty because we were made in the image of God. We get our identities stolen.

And tragically, we pass this lie along like a bad strain of the flu to our kids. Long before the media ever has a grip on a little boy or a little girl’s life, parents play a strong influence. Ira Sacker, co-author of *Dying to Be Thin*, writes this, “Some of my patients, who are just out of nursery school tell me that they’re fat. Turns out that their moms are saying the same things about themselves.” Because we parents buy into the lie, we pass that lie along to our kids at such an early age. We distort the image of God in our kids.

Take a look at this clip from the movie *Spanglish* about an insecure mom and wonderful little girl...

Let me ask you a question: What would happen if the words of an insecure mom or an insensitive dad were replaced with words of truth from a loving, heavenly Father? Would that make a difference? Well, I hope it will, because the alternative is a killer. Let’s take some time and look at, for the sake of this topic, **“Some Victorious Secrets.”**

I want you to see that these are not just rambling thoughts from an imperfect guy. I want you to see that these come straight from the mouth of God. I’ll give you four things that you can do.

Number one, **1. Know what God says.** Here’s a verse of Scripture with some power. Put this in your brain, memorize this. It comes from Colossians 2:8. Look what it says: **“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8, NIV).**

This is teaching us to move through the world saying, “You know what? I refuse to buy this lie any longer. I am not going to let a magazine cover, or a bathroom scale, or a mirror at the gym take me captive. I will not be held prisoner by some silly reflection in a piece of glass. I will pursue nothing but the image of God in me.” You refuse to be taken captive by hollow, deceptive philosophy.

Knowing the truth, knowing that you are loved with an unfailing love and telling yourself the truth about who you are affects the way you eat, it affects the way you drink, the way you love, the way you laugh, the way you exercise, the way you play, the way you work. You know what God says about you. Grasp it. Memorize it. Let it eat all the way through you. Spend time alone journaling and praying with God.

One problem is that we spend so much time thumbing through the pages of *Seventeen* and *Glamour* and *Shape* and *Cosmo* and *Muscle Fitness*, and saying, “If I could only look like that”—when we ought to be spending more time thumbing through the pages of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, looking at Jesus and going, “Man, if I could only look like that. That’s what I want to look like.”

As you know what God says, the image starts to change. Maybe this is one Scripture you ought to start with. This one’s so cool. It comes from Psalm 139:13-14. It’s about all of us. **“For you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well” (Psalm 139:13-14, NIV).**

God tells us that he knit us together with excitement, with hope, with joy, and with precision. Our ethnic heritage, the color of our eyes, the color of our skin, the shape of our face, the curl of our hair—your body is not a mistake. So, know what God says.

Secondly **2. See how God sees.** Learn how to see how God sees. It's one thing to look beautiful, it's another thing to really be beautiful. Ever see someone that's just drop-dead gorgeous? You say, "Man, they're really hot"; and then you get to know them a little bit, and they're not so attractive anymore.

Look what it says in 1 Samuel 16:7 when God asks Samuel to look for the next king. Well, Samuel went to the tall, good-looking guys first, and God says, "**Don't consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things that human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart**" (1 Samuel 16:7, TNIV).

I believe it was the great prophet Fred G. Sanford who said, "Beauty is only skin deep, but ugly goes clear to the bone." You know what? To be honest, theologically, he's not far off. A person can be beautiful on the outside, but ugly on the inside. And God's much more concerned with what's on the inside anyway.

If we're going to get a handle on this whole beauty obsession, body image deal, we're going to have to learn to see how God sees. And it's not on the outside.

You know, some of us get obsessed with clothing. We've got to have exactly the right style, exactly the right trend. We know the rules about slimming black and no horizontal stripes; and we watch *What Not to Wear* and all that kind of stuff. Well, believe it or not, the Word of God has got some great fashion tips. These are some hot new trends for this season. Well, not just for this season; these never go out of style. Look what it says in *The Message* in Colossians 3:12-14, "**So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe that God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all purpose garment. Never be without it.**" (Colossians 3:12-14, TM)

I think we could help each other out by saying, "Wow, you know what? That humility looks good on you. Man, you look hot in that compassion. Wow, that gentleness fits you so well." We could help each other see how God sees, and what really beauty is.

So, know what God says; see how God sees; and, thirdly **3. Love who God loves.** If you want to get a grip on this obsession with yourself, if you want to get your identity back, take your eyes off yourself for a while. Jesus said, *Love your neighbor as yourself* (Mark 12:31); and when you throw yourself into loving your neighbor, when you throw yourself into serving other people, you take your eyes off yourself.

If you're obsessing about the way you look, get up and love your neighbor; get up and serve your neighbor! It's hard to be obsessed with the way you look when you're in a nursing home clipping the toenails of an 85-year-old arthritic woman. When you're pulling off rotting paneling, and scraping off black mold out of a house for somebody whose basement flooded, you don't really care whether or not you're going to have calf implants. When you're holding malnourished children in a remote village in Nicaragua, concern for your haircut is the last thing on your mind. You're not obsessed with those things because you're losing yourself in loving another person and serving.

Love your neighbor. Love who God loves. Isaiah 58:7-8 says that if you would share your food with the hungry, if you would break the chains of injustice, if you would do the right things for people that are in need, [SLIDE...] "**...your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear...**" (Isaiah 58:8, NIV). There's healing for yourself by not focusing on yourself so much.

Know what God says. See what God sees. Love who God loves. One last thing: [SLIDE: add to Victorious Secrets...] **4. Reflect who God is.** Reflect who God is. That's why we were made: to reflect to the rest of the world the image of God and how great his love is.

Did you know that when we come to a relationship with him, God lives in us? Look what it says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, [SLIDE...] "**Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in you and was given to you by God? You don't belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price on a cross. So, you must honor God with your body**" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, NIV).

Isn't that cool? You were bought with a high price. Jesus did not purchase any of our bodies on a clearance rack! It says, ... *honor God with your body.* He made it and he lives in it. Your body is the temple. So, when you know that, you say, "You know what? I'm not going to trash the temple anymore. God, you gave me this body, and you live in it, so I'm going to treat it well. I'm not going to bring glory or attention to myself. I just want to point to the one who lives inside."

And listen, it's okay to decorate the temple. It's okay to take care of the temple. It's okay to do a little home improvement if you need to. We need to strive to live healthy lives eating healthy, getting exercise and good rest.

But the goal is not to draw attention to yourself. The goal is to draw attention to the one who resides within; and when we dress or carry ourselves in a way in which we are inviting other people to worship our bodies, we rob God of the worship that he alone is due.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, it says that we can be mirrors that brightly *reflect the glory of the Lord*. As the Spirit of God works within us, we become more and more like him. (LB). God uses ordinary people like us to reflect his image to a watching world.

The older I get the more this passage means to me: **“So we’re not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without His unfolding grace. There’s far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can’t see now, they’ll last forever” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, TM).**

I got on line last week and looked at some of the before and after pictures of some of these makeover shows. You look at them, and that’s just not the same person. And talk about before and after, I found a college graduation picture of me. I showed it to my daughter Zoe and she said, “Ew, you’re losing your hair!” The before and after pictures are pretty amazing. I mean, you would look at them and go, I don’t know who this is. You just go, Oh, my goodness. I had a lot of hair; and I was really thin. But as sand through the hourglass ... so are the hairs of our lives.

Do you know what I really want? I really want people to look at me and see the amazing, striking difference in the before- and after-Jesus pictures of my life. Before I may have looked better, thinner, had more hair, but there was some ugliness in me that when clear to the bone. I was judgmental, I made fun of people, I was insensitive.

Clothes hung pretty good on me; but I dressed myself in anger, malice, envy, impure thoughts, lust, pride. I let the thief distort the image of God in me. I let him steal my identity.

But then I drew close to God, and God drew close to me; and Jesus Christ filled up the hole in my heart. Through the years and countless reconstructive surgeries, he’s done an extreme makeover on my soul. And the good news is, he’s not done. With that internal focus, I just want to say, I can’t wait till tomorrow, because I get better lookin’ every day.” What about you? Don’t look in the mirror to see your true identity, don’t look at the scale, look at the image of God within you. Don’t let anything, anybody, steal that from you. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pray with me.

God, remind us again, to the depth of our bones that we are accepted; we are secure; we are significant. Remind us that you look at us and he go, “Man, you are so beautiful. You are so handsome. I made you exactly like that because I just love you.”

God, I pray that you would help us to see ourselves the way you see us, as fearfully and wonderfully made, and that we would refuse to let anything else determine our worth.

God, would you stamp in our hearts that even when the world doesn’t choose us, we’re chosen by you; and that’s enough. That’s enough. God, thanks for teaching us today. Continue to teach us this week as we learn these Scriptures.

In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

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