

# kyria

CHOSEN IN CHRIST  
CALLED TO INFLUENCE

## Inner Beauty

Do you see yourself  
as God does?



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## Inner Beauty

Do you see yourself  
as God does?



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Introduction

## Curse or Blessing?

By *Dana Wilkerson*



I don't look my age. I never have.

In elementary school, I was always the smallest person in my class. I don't remember that bothering me. In fact, I think I was proud that I was so short. And it made me a smaller target in dodge ball games. I counted that a blessing.

My freshman year of high school, I begged my parents for a letter jacket—not because I had any letters to put on it, but because I wanted everyone to know I was in high school, not middle school or—horror of horrors—elementary school. I thought looking younger than my age was a curse. I hated it.





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### Curse or Blessing?

When I was buying a bedspread for my dorm room, the saleslady asked if I was redecorating my bedroom. "No, I'm heading off to college," I explained. After a few moments of stunned silence, she found her voice. I don't remember what she said, but I'm sure it did nothing to boost my ego. Again ... the curse.

When I was 25, I offered to chaperone a college women's retreat. When the other chaperone couldn't make it at the last minute, one of the girls asked, "You mean they're letting us go without an adult?" You can imagine my response. Curse again. (No, I didn't curse *at* her, but if I wasn't a Christian ...)

A few years later, after a few minutes of conversation with my teenage seatmate on an airplane, she asked me, "So what high school do you go to?" I burst out laughing before telling her that I was actually a 28-year-old grad student. She was understandably embarrassed, but I reassured her that I didn't mind. I had come to the point where I had decided that looking younger than my age wasn't necessarily a curse. In fact, I even have days when I see it as a blessing again.

As the author of one of the following articles alludes, every aspect of our physical appearance can be considered a curse in some situations and blessing in others. But when it all comes down, it doesn't matter how we look—young or old, skinny or broad, flat-chested or well-endowed. It's about how we appear to God—how we appear on the inside.





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Curse or Blessing?

1 Samuel 16:7 says, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." My hope is that this collection of articles will help you find more value in your heart than in your appearance, because that's *always* a blessing.

Peace,

*Dana Wilkerson*

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads,  
Christianity Today International



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Leader's Guide

## How to use "Inner Beauty" for a group study



**"Inner Beauty" can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.**

- 1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
- 2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
- 3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
- 4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
- 5. When working through the "Reflect" questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
- 6. End the session in prayer.**



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## Move Over, Cindy!



I have a thing or two to tell  
you about beauty.

*By Rhonda Wheeler Stock*

It's the first thing people notice about me when we meet. They get this glazed, deer-in-the-headlights look in their eyes, then spend the rest of the conversation pretending they don't notice. As they finish our conversation and move away, I see them surreptitiously glance back and whisper among themselves. I know exactly what they're saying. "Can you *believe* how much she looks like Cindy Crawford?"

Ok, Ok, I'm not being entirely honest. All right, fine, none of it's true. Period. I bear absolutely no resemblance to Ms. Supermodel, or she to me. I'm a 30-something suburban mother of 4 who drives a *minivan*, for goodness' sakes. I've been known to,





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well, fib about my weight on my driver's license (God doesn't *really* count that as lying, does He?). I pretend to highlight my hair when everyone knows I'm covering the gray. And my idea of a successful photo shoot is when no one in the picture is holding two fingers behind his brother's head and my teenager agrees to wear anything besides baggy jeans and an even baggier T-shirt.

Cindy and I don't just move in different circles, we move on different geometric *planes*. Still, we do have a few things in common, such as breathing. And we're both brunettes, although Cindy has a tawny mane of stylishly tousled locks and I have a conservative bob I hide under a baseball cap when the humidity is high.

Each of us also went through a Richard Gere phase. One of us married the movie star (it wasn't me) and the other merely adored him from afar. In fact, when Mr. Gere swept actress Debra Winger off her feet in the film *An Officer and a Gentleman*, I was ready to march my husband down to the Naval recruiting office. Now that he's into the Buddhist thing (Mr. Gere, not my husband), the passion's gone. Sorry, Richard.

Furthermore, I have a small white scar near my mouth where the doctor removed a horrible warty-looking growth a few years ago. Cindy has a big brown mole in almost the exact same spot. We both have two eyes, two ears, a mouth, and a nose. I'm almost five feet tall, so are her legs. Guess I shouldn't bother auditioning as her body double.





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Yet I know one thing Cindy and I—and every other woman on the planet—do have in common. It's something that transcends time, distance, culture, and creed. It has nothing to do with how wealthy, important, or physically beautiful we are. We can't earn it, buy it, or even ask for it; it's given to us at conception, and we carry it with us for eternity. It's simply this: We each bear the imprint of the Divine Creator. God Almighty, the Holiest Being in the universe, consciously and deliberately made you and me—and Cindy—in His likeness! We can look at one another and know, *This is what God looks like.*

Sometimes we women think of ourselves as the postscript at the end of the creation account. Although the details of Eve's creation appear at the end of Genesis chapter 2, God includes us in the broad outline of creation in chapter 1. Right there, in Genesis 1:27, we read that "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male *and female* He created them" (emphasis added).

Yes, God used a man's rib as a starting point (Gen. 2:21-22). But that's no less miraculous than creating a man from mud! We weren't an afterthought: "Adam looks kinda lonely down there. Hey, I know! I'll make a woman!" God knew all along He would bring into existence a man *and* a woman.

Just as an architect designs and executes a plan, so God had a special plan in mind when He created us. Not physical perfection; different cultures and eras have their own unique definition of beauty. That's why I love to visit art museums. I'm convinced I was born in the wrong century and that Rubens would've chosen me over Cindy any day. We're talking about an indefinable





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*something*, God gives each woman a certain loveliness that's uniquely, wonderfully female.

Each woman is different. Some of us are tall, lean, and graceful. Then there's the rest of us. But short or tall, pretty or pudgy, delicate or sturdy, each is lovely because we're made in God's image. We're beautiful because *He's* beautiful.

So when I see Cindy Crawford on yet another magazine cover, I don't have to envy her voluptuous body and gorgeous looks. (I am envious, but I don't have to be—I have to work on that.) I can look at her and think, *She's made in the image of God.*

Well, actually I'll think, *Parts of her were manufactured here on earth, and that picture's been airbrushed to perfection, but mostly she's made in the image of God.*

Amazingly, I can look in the mirror and say the same thing: "Rhonda, you are created in the image of God. Because of that, *you* are a beautiful woman. Even though your tummy's as soft as Grandma's featherbed and twice as lumpy. And the sand's settled in the middle of your hourglass figure, and you need contact lenses so you can find your eyeglasses, and... ."

Maybe I'd better stay away from the mirror for a while. Hand me my Bible, please!

*Rhonda Wheeler Stock is a freelance writer who lives with her husband, three sons, and daughter in Kansas. This article first appeared in the May/June 1999 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





## Inner Beauty

Move Over, Cindy!

### Reflect

- *If you could teach a supermodel a thing or two about beauty, what would it be?*
- *What do you know about real beauty, and how did you learn it?*
- *Even though we're all made in the image of God, we're still unique. What are the things that make you unique?*



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## Need a Confidence Boost?

Discover the secrets to  
liking yourself more.

*By Verla Gillmor*

**R**ecently, I turned to a friend who was riding in my car and asked her, "What do you like about yourself?" We rode in silence for several minutes. Finally, she turned to me and said, apologetically, "I can't think of anything."

I was stunned. My friend is intelligent, charming, and compassionate—yet she couldn't see any of that.





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I know she's not alone. Low self-esteem has become a number-one issue plaguing Christian women. Despite God's assurance that He's absolutely crazy about us, most of us can't believe He means us. It's like the cynical editor who tells the cub reporter, "If your mother says she loves you, check it out."

#### **Check Out Your Sources**

I was a reporter for 12 years. One of the first things I learned in researching a story was "garbage in, garbage out." If your raw data is flawed, you end up with a faulty conclusion. The same is true with how we see ourselves. If we lack self-confidence, maybe we're working with flawed data.

The reality is, in hundreds of subtle ways, our culture, family, friends—even our thought life—conspire to undermine our confidence. We grow up in families void of affirmation, encouragement, and respect—the building blocks to self-confidence. Then we find ourselves smack dab in the middle of a world that lionizes size 2 Hollywood starlets and Barbie-doll figures. Our paycheck, our title, our designer labels, or some other artificial yardstick gives us temporary entree into the world of The Accepted. But in our hearts, we know it isn't real. How do we find our way to the truth?

In the J.B. Phillips translation of the Bible, Romans 12:3 reads, "Try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all." Our relationship with Jesus sheds new light on who we are and what we do.





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Before we can "hear" it, though, we have to identify the "dirty data" we've believed. We need to expose ways in which *we've* inadvertently contributed to the problem.

#### **Comparison traps.**

I'm technophobic. My brother got all the genes required to understand operating manuals, to repair things, or (gasp!) to make sense of computers. When I first had to learn how to use a computer for my job, I was convinced it was the end of life as I knew it.

I remember with painful clarity a beginner's computer class where the instructor told us to "press any key." I searched in vain for the "any" key. By the end of the class, I was certain I wasn't smart enough to drive myself home, much less dress for work the next day. This was despite the fact that I managed a home, a family, a job, and a professional staff.

Why was it so humiliating? Because I compared myself to the 10-year-old girl next door who effortlessly surfed the Net to do research while I struggled just to log on. Instead of simply concluding that technical prowess is not one of my strengths, I concluded I must be stupid. It was a lie.

#### **The art of the put-down.**

People respect us as much as we respect ourselves. That's why the absence of self-confidence can telegraph to others not to believe in us.

For years, I struggled to receive a compliment graciously. If someone complimented my hair, I'd discount it. I'd say my hairstyle made my face look fat or that my hair was a mousy color. What I really meant was, *There must be*





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*some mistake. I'm not worth your regard. I don't like myself and can't really believe you do, either.* The trouble is, if we persist in putting ourselves down, eventually people start to believe we're right.

#### **Self-doubt.**

Sometimes the problem isn't faulty data. We have an accurate picture of ourselves or a situation, but we capitulate the first time someone challenges us.

Several years ago, I discovered a grape-sized lump on my left breast. My doctor scheduled outpatient surgery right away. A month later, when I resumed periodic self-examination, I felt the same lump in the same hard-to-reach place. I was certain of it! When I called the doctor to suggest he might have missed the lump in question, he insisted I was wrong. It could not *possibly* be a lump, he said, because he had removed it. After all, *he* was the doctor.

I got off the phone, doubting what I'd felt with my own hand. But fear of lethal consequences gave me the courage to insist he re-examine me, at which point he reluctantly acknowledged that, yes, it did seem to be the original lump. He removed it in a second surgery.

#### **Reclaim the Truth**

It's time to go on the offensive and regain the confidence God wants for you. Here are a few ways to get started:

#### **Name the lies—and give them to God.**

Make a list of the falsehoods others have said about you (and what you've believed about yourself). Be specific. Then, agree with God that it's not how He sees you. Tell





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Him, "God, I know you made me—and you don't make junk. These lies have got to go. I want to see myself the way You see me. Please begin the process of changing my mind."

Eugene Petersen, in *The Message* paraphrase of Romans 12:2, urges us to reject the flawed thinking of our culture and those around us: "Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out."

#### **Grieve the loss of what you'll never have and never be.**

I once knew a woman who believed the lie that she was a victim. She wasn't in an abusive situation; she wasn't poor or ill or alone. But she felt as though the world always let her down. Eventually, she confessed to God the truth—playing the victim was easier for her than dealing with her own emotional "junk." But that was only the first step. Next, she had to grieve the loss of a "crutch" she couldn't use anymore. She had to find a whole new way to live.

In my case, I had to confess the lie that I was stupid because I didn't understand technical things. Yet, even after acknowledging that I'm actually a pretty intelligent person, I still had to grieve the fact that no amount of classes or training would ever completely solve my technical ineptitude!

Another lie I believed about myself was that I'd been selfish for having only one child. The truth is, I nearly died giving birth to my daughter, and my husband didn't want to adopt. Still, I spent years feeling like an inferior mother—like I should have trusted God to protect me in subsequent childbirths.





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I now believe that—in my case—one child was God's will for me. I've rejected the condemnation. Nevertheless, I had to grieve that I'd never have the houseful of children I'd always wanted.

### **Replace the lies with the truth.**

God's Word is full of information about your identity and position as a believer in Jesus Christ. Let the wonder of God's perspective on you soak in. Do you fully realize what it means to be ...

Fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14)

Precious to God (Isaiah 43:4)

Cared about since your conception (Isaiah 46:3)

God's child (John 1:12)

Jesus' friend (John 15:15)

Chosen by Jesus (John 15:16)

Loved dearly by God (John 16:27)

Free from condemnation (Romans 8:1)

A temple—a dwelling place—of God's Spirit  
(1 Corinthians 3:16)

Redeemed and forgiven of all your sins  
(Colossians 1:14)

Maybe you'd prefer God say He's crazy about dishwasher blondes who are 20 pounds overweight. Then you'd know He meant you. But God didn't get that specific in describing Eve! All He tells us about her in Gen. 1:27, 31 is that she was made in His image and it was *very good!*





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He feels the same way about you.

#### **Celebrate you!**

During my years as a radio news anchor and reporter in Chicago, I was occasionally called upon to participate in annual fundraising telethons. Telethon producers would round up as many media types as possible to answer phones. Most were TV news anchors with recognizable faces—the thought being they would attract viewers who would then pledge dollars to the cause. Because I worked for one of the major network affiliates, at times I was pressed into service, even though I worked in radio.

During one particular event, I stood off-camera, waiting to be told what to do. It happened during a season in my life when I was trying to figure out who I was and whether I truly liked myself. I'd been in counseling and had been studying God's Word to learn about my identity in Christ.

A twentysomething junior producer came over to me, clipboard in hand, and looked me up and down with obvious disdain. He scanned his list of "celebrity guests," then said, "Are you anybody?"

My mouth dropped open in disbelief. "Well ... no ... I'm not anybody," I said. Suddenly, the absurdity of his comment hit me and I started to laugh. "You know, once I was *nobody*. Does that help you? But, listen," I whispered, leaning toward him, "Now I'm *somebody*! I'm just not somebody you know." He shook his head, clueless, and walked away.





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You, too, are somebody—somebody worth the sacrifice of what was most precious to God—His only Son. God may be the only person you'll *ever* know who loves you unconditionally. But once this truth soaks in, God's opinion becomes the only one that really matters.

*Verla Gillmor, a speaker and writer, lives in the Chicago area. This article first appeared in the May/June 2000 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Reflect

- *What judgments do you make about yourself that are, in fact, untrue? What's something wonderful about you that you've undervalued?*
- *How do you typically respond when someone brags about you? Is it hard for you to receive a compliment? Why?*
- *Who do you compare yourself to? What can you do to stop the comparison trap and realize that God made you exactly who He wanted you to be?*



## Pretty Woman



I thought “beautiful” was out of reach for an average woman like me.

*By Shea M. Gregory*

**W**hen I was a little girl, I used to wonder if, before we were born, we stood in line in heaven and requested our lives.

“Ah,” I imagined a large angel with an imposing wing span speaking to me, “you’re going to be a girl. Very well, what would you like? Long legs? A great figure? Fame? Fortune?”

Innocently, I answered him, “If you please, sir, I’d like ... a nice personality.” And with no time to reconsider—Zap!—I was born and here I am. Less than five feet tall, not-so-straight teeth, blotchy skin, and enough of a figure for two women.



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### Pretty Woman

Once, I asked my brother if he thought I was pretty. He glanced up at me from his sheet music and told me to go away. "Darnell, I'm serious," I whined. "Am I pretty?"

Realizing the only way to get me to leave was to answer me, he took a deep breath and looked me over from head to toe. "Your face is all right," he said finally. "You have a quirky personality. You're okay."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I asked, my voice rising. "So, what you're saying is, I'm too fat and I act like a fool!"

"That's not what I said," he answered calmly, returning to his work.

"That's not what you said? That's exactly what you said!" I spit out at him. "You said no guy will ever want me because I'm ugly and I'm stupid! What do I have to do to get a little affirmation around here?!" I yelled, storming from the room.

So this was my life. Throughout it I struggled with feelings of ugliness and inadequacy. My friends had good looks, skinny ankles, and straight teeth. They got asked out on dates. I got dates on a fruit tray at Christmas. They became homecoming queens and cheerleaders while I wallowed in a state of below averageness, longing to be an airbrushed model, waiting to wake up beautiful.

Then one day I met Jesus. A girlfriend had invited me to church. As I sang along with the rest of the voices lifted in worship, I was overcome by a sense of guilt and unworthiness. This wonderful God we were singing





## Inner Beauty Pretty Woman

about, how could He love fat and ugly me? But during the service I began to realize that God *does* love me—just as I am. That day I accepted God's love and sacrifice for me. Over time, I've gained the assurance that He loves me more than I can imagine and that I'm truly beautiful in the way that matters most—on the inside.

But my old negative feelings about myself didn't immediately disappear. Some days, they came in droves, and I struggled to battle them off. Like the time I met with my friends Diane and Leona for lunch.

I was thirtysomething, reaching my sexual prime, unmarried, and retaining water. It wasn't a good day. We met at a local restaurant and the topic of conversation quickly turned to men.

"So, how's Eugene?" Diane asked.

Leona waved her hand. "Oh, please, no," she answered.

"You're not seeing him anymore?" I asked.

"Girl, that was two weeks ago," she replied, "and we weren't really seeing each other. We were just, you know, talkin'."

"Oh," Diane and I replied in unison.

"No!" Leona stressed emphatically and started naming other guys she'd met recently.

"What I want to know is how and where you meet these men?" Diane queried.





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Leona sighed heavily as if disgusted by it all. Personally, I was on the edge of my seat, ready to take mental notes. At the first opportune moment, I'd run to the bathroom and write it all down on a square of toilet paper. She took a slow, laborious bite of her sandwich and chewed thoughtfully.

*Please answer the question*, I thought to myself. I was holding my breath. My future hung in the balance between Leona's answer and pastrami on rye.

She took too long. I reached over and moved her plate to the other end of the table. "Spill the beans, now!" I hissed.

Leona pouted as if I'd hurt her feelings, then rolled her eyes. She'd seen this look before. It was ugly. My glare spoke envy. It exposed my desperation and longing, all the feelings a mature Christian woman should have risen above. But this Plainer-Than-Jane was sick and tired of being quirky. I wanted a man.

"Where are the men? How do I get one?" I whispered.

Leona pursed her lips. But I held my ground. No info, no sandwich.

I won.

"You know how it is," she said. "You walk out the door and men ask you out on a date."

*What?!*





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### Pretty Woman

"Oh," I replied softly. Obviously, I lived in the wrong neighborhood. I looked to Diane. After a few moments she remembered she had food in her mouth and closed it.

"You girls know what it's like," Leona continued. "You can't even walk to the car these days without having men stop to talk to you."

"No, Leona," I said flatly. "I don't know what it's like."

"Oh girl, yes you do," she insisted.

I watched Leona. She was drop-dead beautiful from head to toe. Her movements were soft and flowing, her voice soft, sultry. Every hair was in place and her fashionable clothes fit perfectly. I tried to remember the last time I'd visited a beauty salon and thought of the four-year-old bra I was wearing, held together with a carefully placed safety pin. I felt very inadequate.

"Do men ask you out every time you walk out your door?" I asked Diane later that afternoon when she dropped me off at home.

"No," she said.

"Me neither. Do you think I should move to a different street?"

My friend looked at me searchingly. Looking at me like that, she reminded me a lot of my brother.

Waving good-bye, I got an idea. It came to me suddenly, like a craving for chocolate. I ran to the house and into





## Inner Beauty Pretty Woman

the bedroom, stripped, and stood naked in front of the mirror. After the initial shock wore off, I peered at myself from every imaginable angle, trying to catch my best side. *If I can accentuate my best angle, I'll be asked out all the time, too*, I thought to myself. Finally, however, I gave up and did humanity a favor by putting my clothes back on.

Self-esteem depleted, I hung my head and was ready to fling myself onto the bed in despair when I saw my Bible next to my pillow. I opened it to Psalm 139. "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" is what the psalmist said in verse 14.

"I know God, but ... ," I began to protest; then the words of 1 Samuel, chapter 16 came to mind. "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (v. 7).

I was thoughtful for a few moments. Then, hesitantly, I got up and peeked back in the mirror. All of me was still there, every lovin' inch. "Well, God," I said, still looking at my not-so-perfect, ample reflection, "Your Word says I'm special, so it must be true." The face smiling back at me winked knowingly. I said a short prayer of thanksgiving and did the best thing I could have possibly done for myself at that moment. I went shopping.

Leona's married now. She says she was just walking down the street. "You know how it is downtown, girl. You walk past a store and all the guys come out. They ask you out; they ask you to marry them. So one day ..."

I've walked down that street a hundred times and no shop owner or clerk ever asked me anything, not even what time it was. It was hard, but I forced myself to face reality.





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### Pretty Woman

They must've all been busy with customers when I went past. Obviously, they hadn't read 1 Samuel lately.

I asked my brother recently, "Darnell, am I pretty?"

He smiled. "You're a precious pearl," he said, "a beautiful, godly woman."

Guess we've both improved over the years.

*Shea M. Gregory is a freelance writer living in California. This article first appeared in the September/October 1997 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Reflect

- *If, like the author imagined, you could have asked an angel for anything, what would it be? Why?*
- *How do you feel about yourself when you're around women who are prettier than you on the outside? How does that compare to how God feels about you?*
- *What does Psalm 139:14 mean to you?*





## The Weight of My Worth

My battle with anorexia.  
*By Renee Ratcliffe*

Oftentimes, I'm still embarrassed to have struggled with an eating disorder. I thought anorexia only happened to teens—I was in my mid-twenties with a great husband, steady career, and strong Christian faith.

Looking back, I recognize I had many traits of a typical anorexic. I was compulsive, a perfectionist, and a people-pleaser. As a special education teacher for severely disabled children, I labored to satisfy my supervisors and students' parents.



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### The Weight of My Worth

During my second year of teaching, I got married. Although my husband, John, never had unreasonable demands about our relationship or home life, I expected to become an ideal wife and homemaker. Plus, John and I volunteered for many church activities. Within these roles, I tried to be disciplined, successful, perfect. I never suspected my perfectionism would drain my spirit and impoverish my body.

I was aware, however, that I was eating more, probably because of stress. I'd gained 10 pounds in the 10 months since our wedding. One stressful day, I ate an entire pan of brownies. So I responded to this binge by joining a gym and forsaking sweets. But my perfectionism took hold there, too, as I started exercising two hours a day. Magazine articles that promised "Lose 10 pounds in 2 weeks!" engrossed me. I developed a fat-phobia and forsook any food other than fat-free products. By depriving myself and exercising compulsively, I finally felt in control of something in my life, since I couldn't control how others perceived how I kept up with homemaking, career, church, and relationships.

Soon my weight plummeted. Fearful of consuming more than 1,000 calories a day, I limited my diet to carrots, cereal with water, and lots of liquids to fill my stomach. I was simultaneously alarmed and pleased about my gaunt appearance. My ribs and cheekbones jugged out, my hair fell out in clumps, and my skin became dry and thin. I shunned anyone who expressed concern over my rapid weight loss. I even turned away from God when I felt Him convicting me of the truth.





## Inner Beauty

### The Weight of My Worth

After two to three months I'd dropped about 30 pounds (from my beginning weight of 125). Within a period of two days, the gym manager forbade me to return, my boss ordered an immediate leave-of-absence, and a physician-friend implored John to seek medical intervention. John pleaded with me to get help, so I reluctantly let him take me to a clinic. There the physician weighed me in at 79 pounds. I felt deeply ashamed to hear what I already knew: "You have anorexia."

It's been four years since that diagnosis. Recovery's been slow, but not elusive. During one dark moment, I recalled a sermon in which my pastor lit a candle to illustrate Isaiah 42:3: "A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out." *Yes, God, I realized, You keep my light burning; you still believe in me!* I knew God would heal me if I'd release my need for control to Him. When I went to God for help, I found such Bible verses as "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 3:7- 8).

I started working with a caring dietician who helped me understand my need for food to cure my malnutrition. She required me to eat a minimal amount of calories—2,000—and record them in a food diary. At first I exaggerated my calorie count because I was afraid I'd return to overeating.

Breaking down my resistance invoked a lot of prayer. I struggled with fear and shame, and when destroying thoughts came, *Do you need to eat dinner? Remember those four jelly beans from this morning?*, I quoted James 4:17,





## Inner Beauty

### The Weight of My Worth

"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." Each day, I had choices: Either follow my fears, perpetuating the struggle, or surrender to God's power and freedom. Even today, I still must consciously choose to follow Christ in every decision.

But I've learned to accept rest, balance, and vulnerability as good things, and I've become honest about my limitations. I enjoy my job at a seminary working with people who care about my physical and spiritual well-being. Desire, rather than obligation, motivates me to volunteer for different activities. My relationships are much deeper because I can share myself—weaknesses and all—with others. My husband, parents, family, and friends have loved me generously and persistently.

I'm so thankful Jesus offers His grace, acceptance, and love to everyone—young girl, daughter, wife, mother, career woman—who needs significance, purpose, and understanding. The world urges us to be attractive, profitable, and totally capable in every role. Yet, I've discovered while it's desirable to succeed, God's grace covers our abilities, our needs, and even our shortcomings and failures. I'm God's daughter—totally accepted, pleasing, and loved in His sight—just as I am.

*Renee Ratcliffe works as a research specialist and disabilities coordinator at Reformed Theological Seminary, Virtual Campus, and lives in North Carolina. This article first appeared in the July/August 2000 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





## Inner Beauty

The Weight of My Worth

### Reflect

- *In what ways can you relate to the author?*
- *In what areas do you struggle with self-image?  
How can you ease the struggle?*
- *If you suspected your best friend or daughter was anorexic, what would you do?*



# kyria

## Flying Lesson



It took a young traveling companion to help me with my baggage.

*By Liz Curtis Higgs*

**T**he two-hour flight to Dallas was minutes from take-off as I settled into my aisle seat—7-B—and began to pray for whoever might sit in 7-A.

Not for his or her soul, though that would have been the right and holy thing to do. No, I was praying about this person's size. Hoping the stranger would be petite and/or patient, someone who wouldn't feel miserable squished next to an abundantly blessed woman. In a roomy 737 jet, no problem; in a tiny commuter plane with every seat sold, big problem. *Please, Lord. Someone kind. And small.*



## Inner Beauty

### Flying Lesson

As I watched the passengers file past, I mentally rehearsed my opening patter: *They keep making these planes smaller, don't they? or, Sure wish my hips could fit in the overhead compartment!* Anything to put him or her at ease and avoid an embarrassing scene. Moments later, a slender, smiling boy appeared by my seat. "I'm 7-A."

"So you are!" I crowed. *Thank you, Lord.* He had blond hair, round eyeglasses, and the pink cheeks of late childhood. I pegged him at nine or ten, maybe even a mature age eight.

He climbed into his seat, barely taking up half of it, and announced, "I like this plane. It's my size." He leaned toward me and added in a stage whisper, "It makes me feel bigger." *Bless his heart.* I asked his name, wondering what it must be like to travel alone at such a young age, then gently patted his arm. "I'm here if you need anything."

After he drifted off to sleep, I resisted the maternal urge to smooth back the hair that fell across his brow. *So young, so vulnerable.*

When the engines grew louder, signaling our descent, my young neighbor woke with a yawn, glanced at his watch, and grinned. "Whadya know? My birthday's next week." I beamed at him, picturing the big party his parents would throw. "A birthday, is it?"  
"Yeah. I'll be 15."

My smile froze in place. *It couldn't be!* Not this small boy, no taller than a third-grader.





## Inner Beauty

### Flying Lesson

Think of the snide comments his peers must throw at him! Not to mention the many clueless strangers—such as me—who treat him as though he's a half-grown child instead of a full-fledged teenager.

"Happy birthday," I murmured, my heart breaking. What must it be like to be smaller than people expect?

The answer came from deep inside: *It's like being larger than people expect.*

*Oh, Lord. Of course.*

I looked down and fumbled with my seat belt, suddenly feeling exposed. Just as this self-conscious teen kept his defense tactics at the ready—*It's my size* and *My birthday's next week*—I had my verbal arsenal loaded as well, deflecting imagined criticism by beating people to the punch—*They keep making these planes smaller, don't they?*

No, Liz. They don't.

The time had come to see my self-effacing banter for what it was: fear of rejection. *You won't like me. You won't approve. You'll say something unkind.*

The apostle Paul once asked, "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God?" (Galatians 1:10). I was trying to please men all right. Or spare myself their displeasure. God, sorry to say, hadn't entered into the equation at all.





## Inner Beauty

### Flying Lesson

I needed to pray, not for my own comfort, but for the opportunity to comfort another. To pray not to be loved, but for a chance to demonstrate Christ's love to a stranger. To be more other-conscious and less self-conscious. To seek God's approval *alone*.

Resolving to do better on the next leg of my trip, I looked up and caught the small teenager watching me with a curious gaze.

"You okay, ma'am?" he asked as the wheels touched the runway.

"More than okay." I grinned. "Thanks to you."

*Liz Curtis Higgs, author of numerous books, lives with her family in Kentucky. This article first appeared in the May/June 2003 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Reflect

- *In what ways do you try to "win the approval of men" (Gal. 1:10) instead of God?*
- *The author mentions her "verbal arsenal" for gaining approval in areas where she feels self-conscious. What kinds of things are in your verbal arsenal?*
- *How can you demonstrate Christ's love to a stranger who is self-conscious?*





## Bigger Isn't Always Better

What I learned from having breast implants.

By Tamara Wells\*

**B**efore *Extreme Makeover* ever hit television, I was a poster child for plastic surgery. My surgeon displayed my before-and-after photos in medical seminars and classrooms across the nation, touting me as a breast augmentation "success story." But there's another side to this story—*my* side.

Before surgery, I didn't have enough body fat to fill out a training bra. I had a 28-inch bust line and a boyfriend, Chad\*; losing him spurred me to get the breast implants I occasionally mused about. I was only 25 at the time.



## Inner Beauty

Bigger Isn't Always Better

### Losing a Boyfriend, Gaining a Bust

I met Chad at a bar, where I was hanging out with a non-Christian friend to cheer her up after a recent breakup. Chad and I talked all evening; it didn't take me long to realize I was more attracted to him than to any of the Christian guys I knew. Although I realized God didn't want me to become seriously involved with a non-Christian, the dearth of dates on my calendar convinced me I had nothing to lose. So I called him a few days later, and we began dating. In a few months' time, I had fallen hard for Chad, thinking he was *the one*. When he unexpectedly ended our relationship, I was devastated; I fretted over what was so wrong with me that the man I loved could drop me without explanation. All the names I'd been called in my youth—"Twiggy," "stick figure," "toothpick"—came back to me.

Depressed, I had breast implants within three months of our breakup. As a believer, I had an inkling getting implants wasn't part of God's plan. But I was tired of being single, and I saw implants as a way of securing the attention of eligible men. Surprisingly, my family supported my decision. My flat-chested mother encouraged me to go for it. She wore padded bras because my father, a non-Christian, made her feel inadequate next to the big-breasted centerfolds he ogled in *Playboy*. My eldest sister, whose breasts were now saggy and stretch-marked after nursing two children, also was considering breast implants. As I told a friend after my surgery, "Some women color their hair after a breakup. I got a boob job."

Once I healed, I called Chad and told him what I'd done, secretly wondering if I could win him back now that I'd improved my looks.





## Inner Beauty

Bigger Isn't Always Better

"Why'd you do that?" he asked, a disbelieving laugh in his voice. "Don't you think I knew how much you had when I first asked you out?"

I expressed my insecurities about our breakup, and he told me he needed to end the relationship because my faith and his aspirations to become a professional athlete were in conflict.

"While you want to go to church stuff," he said, "I want to work out." An unbeliever, Chad recognized my "church stuff" took too much time away from his training. The breast implants failed to win me the love I craved, but I comforted myself with a shopping trip, buying bras and strapless dresses that, for the first time, actually fit.

### Unwanted Distraction

I changed jobs and churches shortly after getting the implants and made sure I dressed in a way that didn't flaunt my new figure. A few people who knew me commented that I looked bustier than they remembered, but I just responded, "Yeah, I finally gained some weight."

Not wanting to become romantically involved with another unbeliever, I visited Christian singles groups and churches with a singles ministry. When I walked into the churches, some of the women looked worriedly at me, and a few even latched on to the arms of their husband or boyfriend.

I was unused to this reaction. Now a B-cup at max, I wasn't disproportionately large. But at 115 pounds and 5'7", I looked like a blonde ballerina with boobs. Overnight, it seems, I'd turned into some sort of threat.





## Inner Beauty

Bigger Isn't Always Better

At the time of my surgery, my surgeon had discussed the risks of breast augmentation: capsular contracture (breasts hardening like rocks); rupturing; rippling; "bottoming out" (breasts sinking in the breast pocket); and pain or loss of pleasurable sensation. I also knew not to expect my breast implants to last a lifetime.

What I wasn't warned about were social situations I wasn't prepared to handle. Outside the church scene, men regularly eyed my breasts instead of my face when talking to me, and even occasionally made lewd comments. Even at a Christian singles activity, a man once caught me alone and made a suggestive remark. I stared at him, not knowing what to say.

"Don't try to tell me you're still a virgin," he said, sneering.

But I *was*.

I now seemed to attract the wrong kind of guy. And I worried that my future husband might be disappointed when he learned the truth about my breasts.

My implanted breasts felt unnaturally firm to me, pressing into my rib cage like two tennis balls whenever I tried to sleep on my stomach. They got in my way when I tried to swing golf clubs or do everyday tasks. Although I'd been elated to get them, feeling as though I finally went through a part of puberty I'd been cheated of, I now felt I was kidding myself. These weren't breasts; they were bags of saline and silicone riding around on my chest wall, high-tech bra stuffing.





## Inner Beauty

Bigger Isn't Always Better

I felt I was carrying a secret that might harm me if I revealed it too soon in a relationship, but might harm me even more if I revealed it too late. How, as a Christian, was I to bring up my breasts in a conversation with a date?

### Back to God's Original Plan

After three years with the implants, I began dating Steve\*, a Christian who treated me the way men had before my surgery. I felt so comfortable with him that I shared the truth about my implants.

"They don't feel real to me," I said. "I wish I could go back, but I'm scared what my body might look like after another surgery."

"Get rid of the implants," Steve said. "If a man's right for you, he shouldn't need them to feel attracted to you. I don't."

A few months after we began dating, Steve asked me to marry him, and a few months later, I had my surgery reversed.

Through my experience, I learned large breasts can be a blessing or a curse, just as small breasts or no breasts can be. We're created by God in different ways, and those ways each have their advantages and disadvantages. Before my implants, I'd been blinded by society's ideas of how I should look. I hadn't realized being flat-chested could serve as a firewall to so many sleazeballs. I'd also lost sight of the fact *God* had personally crafted me in my mother's womb, that I was "fearfully and wonderfully





## Inner Beauty

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made" (Psalm 139:14) by Him—and that included my small bust! I now realized what mattered most to God was my heart, not my cup size.

After we were married, I said to Steve, "One thing I always loved about you is that you looked at me when you spoke to me. You didn't stand around ogling my breasts like other guys did."

Steve coughed slightly and said, "You know, honey, some men are attracted to boobs; some aren't so much."

Fishing for a compliment, I asked him, "So what are you attracted to?"

"Well," he said, "I couldn't help noticing that cute little tush of yours."

I'm sure God was laughing at all my previous antics to land this man, the love of my life.

*\* Names have been changed.*

*Tamara Wells is a pseudonym for a freelance writer living in the Midwest. This article first appeared in the May/June 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





## Inner Beauty

Bigger Isn't Always Better

### Reflect

- *In what ways have you tried to change your appearance to gain acceptance? What was the result?*
- *How do you think God feels about plastic surgery?*
- *The author says, "I now realized what mattered most to God was my heart ..." How can you make sure your heart is in the right place?*





## Romance, TV-Style

How reality shows have impacted our view of love and marriage.

*By Camerin Courtney*

**T**ime was when the winners of television game shows earned a roomful of furniture, a trip to Tahiti, or, if they were really lucky, a brand new car! Today, winners of some such shows earn a *wife*. There also was a time when a date consisted of two people and a pizza place or movie theater. Now, dates can consist of 26 singles, a posh estate, and a plethora of TV cameras.

Oh how times have changed!



## Inner Beauty

Romance, TV-Style

Reality television shows not only have altered our entertainment choices, but also our thoughts about romantic relationships. And while most of us are aware that shows such as *The Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette*, *Joe Millionaire*, *For Love or Money*, *Blind Date*, and *ElimiDATE* are mainly a form of entertainment, the word reality in this genre can be confusing. Just how much are these programs affecting the way we view romance, dating, love, and marriage?

In search of some answers, we gathered four Christian women from different walks of life to share their take on this new trend.

### ***Why do you think there's been a surge in relationship-oriented reality TV shows recently?***

**LaTonya:** We live in a tabloid-oriented culture. For example, celebrity couple Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez graced countless magazine covers and even were discussed on serious news shows as we tried to figure out if they were going to get married or not. As a society, we want to watch. We want to see the carnage.

Also, if you're single, as I am, it's more difficult to find a dating pool these days. There's no boy next door I've known forever who shares my values, or longtime church friends who will introduce me to quality, compatible single men. Consequently, many singles aren't in a relationship, even though we really want to be. So some people feel as though they need to go to extreme measures to get into a relationship, such as going on national television.





## Inner Beauty

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**Carla:** Plus, there's something tantalizing about living vicariously through somebody else's relationship. I think a lot of people thirst for drama because our lives often feel mundane. So these shows provide something exciting to talk about around the water cooler the next day at work.

### ***As a whole, how are women portrayed on these shows?***

**Margaret:** As objects. In fact, they treat *themselves* as objects. For example, on the first episode of the most recent *The Bachelor* series, the producers who chose who would be on the show talked briefly about the women's intelligence, but they mostly focused on the fact that these women had to have bikini-worthy bodies. Based on previous shows in this series, this should have come as no surprise. They knew that's what they signed up for. These shows totally objectify women and tell us that what's valuable about us is our appearance and our sexuality.

**Carla:** It seems the women on these shows see their bodies as a means to an end—which in this case is a relationship. Instead of celebrating their sexuality as something good in itself and in the healthy context of marriage, they seem to see it as a way to get what they want.

**LaTonya:** This is an interesting study in post-feminism. On one hand, these women value their femininity and they're working it. They're in red ball gowns and they've got the fluffy hair. But they're using these things as currency in this dating exchange. So I'm not sure if this is empowerment—or victimization.





## Inner Beauty

Romance, TV-Style

**Lisa:** I think it's both. In her book, *The Beauty Myth*, feminist author Naomi Wolf asserts that when you see women gaining power in the culture, there's always a beauty backlash that communicates, *No, this is what you're valued for*. And so shows such as these play into that. Actually, pretty much all our entertainment media plays into that.

What's remarkable to me is that these are intelligent, professional women. And yet they're succumbing to the voices in our culture that say, "No matter what you achieve elsewhere, you're only valuable and lovable if you're sexy and beautiful."

***But as Christian women, we know that's not the source of our worth.***

**Carla:** I think that's a huge struggle for us—how do we feel attractive without compromising ourselves and our values? I wrestle with that a lot. Just how much effort should I put into looking good when I know that's not the most important thing? How much time is it okay to spend doing my hair and putting on makeup in the morning? At the same time, I don't want to look slovenly.

**Margaret:** Christian women may know their value isn't found in outward appearance, but we still live in a culture that places a high value on that. One of my clients recently told me, "I know you say beauty isn't what's important. I know my faith says it's not what's important. But *everything* around me says that's important." Even though we know we should resist, it's difficult not to get pulled into our society's thinking.





## Inner Beauty

Romance, TV-Style

It's also tough when we feel the negative effects of deciding to be more modest and more concerned with the state of our soul than with the way we look.

### ***Are these shows upping the ante about what we expect in terms of romance?***

**Lisa:** When I talked with one of my college students about these shows, she mentioned that not only reality television, but also romantic comedies set her up for unrealistic expectations.

I agree with her wholeheartedly. These movies and TV shows offer such a thin slice of a person's life. All we see is a couple falling in love; it ends with the wedding. There's no sense of what develops in the subsequent 30, 40, 50 years. It's rare to get a depiction of the goodness and depth that come with longevity, with living alongside someone in God's grace over the years. From current entertainment choices, we get the sense that the only thing that matters is falling in love. That can lead to a dangerous notion that once you're out of that phase in a relationship, that initial rush of love, then you must not be in love anymore. Then it's time to find somebody new so you can feel that way again.

**Carla:** I think the shows feed into the fairytale princess ideal that's been embedded in us from the time we're little girls. We know Cinderella isn't real, but there's a part of us that thinks that's how it *should* be—the dreamy romance, being swept off our feet. No woman I know would say, "I'm not going to date this guy because he doesn't take me to Maui for the weekend like *The Bachelor* did." We understand that's not real life, but I think it feeds into something deeper in us—our expectations about romance.





## Inner Beauty

Romance, TV-Style

In fact, one of the regular arguments I have with my husband is about my romantic expectations versus his. I want the little gestures, the love notes in my briefcase, but my husband's not that guy. He often asks me if I've *ever* known a guy who naturally does those kinds of things. And, of course, I haven't. That's an expectation that's been created outside reality. And these shows, especially the way they're called "reality" programming, feed into those unrealistic expectations.

### ***Do these shows give an accurate portrayal of the dating scene?***

**Margaret:** I think these programs accurately show the way a lot of single women desperately want to be wanted and loved. We look at the women who cry when they're rejected on these shows, when they've barely gotten to know the man who rejected them. We think they're so foolish, but underneath they just got confused, thinking that if someone would want them and choose them, then they'd be valuable. I don't think these women fall in love with the person, but with the concept of being in love and, more importantly, of being loved.

Part of me wonders if these shows are that different from church singles groups. Often singles groups get a bad reputation for being meat markets. There's competition among Christian women for the few Christian men in the group, as well as the cattiness that can accompany that.

**LaTonya:** These shows don't help the temptation to despair about the current dating scene. When I watch them, I think, *If that's what it's like out there, I'm not going!* Seeing 25 women in bikinis heading for the hot tub makes me wonder how a Christian single woman fits into this picture.





## Inner Beauty

Romance, TV-Style

### **How do Christians fit into the current dating scene?**

**Margaret:** Honestly, in my circle of friends, I know Christian women and men who desperately want God's best for them and who are earnestly seeking that in healthy ways. Watching these shows reinforces my thinking that I wouldn't want to be a non-Christian out there looking for a husband.

**LaTonya:** Hopefully we as believers are aware of how much more there is to life than a romantic relationship. On one show, one of the women who'd just been rejected broke down, saying, "This is the biggest risk I've ever taken." That scared me. I thought, *You're 22 and this is it?* A risk is climbing a mountain or launching a ministry. Women need to take good risks, to have a full life.

### **What messages do these shows send us about marriage?**

**LaTonya:** On many of these shows, marriage is something women win. They earn it. They're good enough for it. I think that sends a damaging message to singles. It communicates, *If you aren't married, you haven't won; you've lost.* People often say, "Why isn't a pretty, smart girl like you married?" as if it's a prize rather than a blessing that happens according to God's will and timetable.

**Carla:** I think it's telling that none of these relationship-based reality shows has produced a lasting marriage yet.

**Lisa:** These shows send a warped image about love. The women claim to be in love after spending a few moments with someone. It's such a Hollywood notion of love, like love at first sight. What a misconception! In reality, love is based not only on attraction but on choice and commitment.





## Inner Beauty

Romance, TV-Style

Healthy relationships take time to grow and deepen. These shows give a shallow model of love, and it scares me that young girls are watching and being influenced by these messages. Hollywood romantic comedies can be just as bad, but this is *reality* TV; this is supposed to be *real*.

### **Speaking of young girls, how do moms handle these shows?**

**Carla:** Though my kids are currently too young for these shows, if they're interested in watching them when they get older, I plan to watch with them.

There are messages on these shows I'd want to help debunk, such as the notion that premarital sex is the norm. Relationships are so sexualized on these programs, and anything other than a high level of physical contact is considered abnormal behavior. Obviously, as Christians, we believe otherwise.

As a parent, I think the responsible option is to teach my children how to process such shows and teach them how to develop their own filters for what's real and appropriate.

**Lisa:** I watched *For Love or Money* with one of my daughters, and we had a constant conversation throughout the show. We talked about the scripting and editing, what we thought the producers wanted us to see, what we really thought the people on the shows were feeling, and whether or not we thought those feelings were genuine.

When you forbid your kids to watch these shows, it makes the programs even more attractive. And if they don't watch them at your house, they'll watch them somewhere else. So





## Inner Beauty

Romance, TV-Style

I'd rather sit down and watch these shows with my kids and do the social critique afterward.

***One critique that could be made is that these shows lack ethnic diversity. How does that make you who aren't represented on such shows feel?***

**LaTonya:** The challenge of being a minority in America is having to convince myself daily that I exist. I feel like the invisible demographic because I'm often underrepresented in society. These shows are discouraging in that way. Good grief, where's the black guy? A couple of times they've thrown in one African American woman on *The Bachelor* shows. But what a joke, like she's going to get picked, like *that's* going to happen on national television. As far as we've come, America still isn't ready for that yet.

***So should Christians even watch these shows?***

**Lisa:** I've watched a few of these shows to be aware of what my daughters and students are watching. I want to be culturally literate, but I just need a sampling, not a steady diet of such shows to be knowledgeable about this trend.

As radical as it sounds, for the most part I'd say we shouldn't watch reality television. In fact, there aren't many healthy options on TV—period. Part of television's intent is to create discontent. The whole point is to bring an audience to the advertisers, and they're bent on convincing us we're not whole without their product. Often we just assume television is okay because most Christians watch it. But I don't think we should only be concerned about what our kids watch. We need to constantly ask ourselves about the shows we watch, *What does this breed in me that I don't want bred?*





## Inner Beauty

Romance, TV-Style

### Our panelists:

#### **Carla Barnhill,**

Age: 37 Occupation: Author of a book on motherhood

Family: Husband of 10 years, Jimmy; children Emily (6) and Isaac (3)

#### **Lisa McMinn,**

Age: 45 Occupation: Associate Professor of Sociology at Wheaton College; author of *Growing Strong Daughters*

(Baker) and *Sexuality and Holy Longing* (Jossey-Bass)

Family: Husband of 25 years, Mark; daughters Rae (23), Sarah (21), and Megan (19)

#### **Margaret Nagib, Psy.D.,**

Age: 31 Occupation: Clinical psychologist with Meier

Clinics, specializing in eating disorders Family: Never-married single woman

#### **LaTonya Taylor,**

Age: 24 Occupation: Former associate Editor of *CAMPUS LIFE*

magazine Family: Never-married single woman

*This article first appeared in the January/February 2004 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





## Reflect

- *How have you felt the negative effects of deciding to be more modest and more concerned with the state of your soul than with the way you look? How have you felt the positive effects?*
- *One panelist says, "Part of me wonders if these shows are that different from church singles groups." What is your opinion?*
- *Choose three of the questions asked of the panelists and answer them yourself.*



# kyria



## Redefining “Beautiful”

Women like you define inner beauty.

*Compiled by the editors of TODAY's  
CHRISTIAN WOMAN*

**T**hrough my missions work with hungry, uneducated children in developing countries, I've learned that worrying about a skin blemish or my oversized nose is a superficial waste of energy. I need my passion for more important things!

*—Terri Urban, Colorado*

**M**y daughter, Hannah, was 5 months old and I was still pudgy, jiggly, and lumpy from what I call “the 4th trimester,” when I discovered I was pregnant again. As I hung up the maternity clothes I'd put in storage only days earlier, my size-6 jeans taunted me in my closet.





## Inner Beauty

Redefining "Beautiful"

Hannah is now 18 months, and sweet baby Sarah is 4-1/2 months old. Yesterday, Hannah touched my cheek and said, "Mama pretty!" Her sincerity made me feel like a queen. Last night, Sarah's entire face lit up with a radiant smile as I walked into the room. This morning, my husband looked at me with love in his eyes, silently telling me I'm a beautiful wife and mother. I'm blessed with a family that reflects the God-given beauty within me.

And those before-baby jeans? I gave them away. Last time I checked, God's beauty didn't come packaged in size 6!

—*Kimberly Jordan, Arizona*

A few months ago, I joined a weight-loss program and started going to the gym every day so I could look beautiful. Soon after, I realized I was trying to live up to the world's impossible standard of beauty, not God's. Proverbs 31:30 says, "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." Now when I exercise, my focus isn't fitting into a certain clothing size, it's staying healthy so I can live long enough to watch my children grow up and have children of their own.

—*Jeanette Campbell, Ohio*

Every year, my town selects a woman to reign over its 4th of July festivities. Last year my professional women's group asked me to represent them in this competition. Though I thought it would be a great way to highlight our group, I almost didn't participate, because I have what author Liz Curtis Higgs calls an "abundantly blessed body."





## Inner Beauty

Redefining "Beautiful"

When my name was announced as the winner, I was stunned. I'd prayed I'd represent women of all sizes who struggle with the idea that beauty is only external, but I had no idea I'd actually win! Receiving so many well wishes since that night has helped me be able to look at the pictures of my crowning and see the glow of my spirit, instead of the size of my body.

When I rode in the 4th of July parade with my husband and our boys, I didn't dwell on whether or not I looked good. I simply had fun waving and celebrating the first Independence Day of the new millennium. We had a blast!

—Lynn Shaw, Indiana

**M**y mom taught me a lot about beauty as she cared for her own ailing mother a few years ago. Real beauty was the way Mom unselfishly spent day after day at the nursing home. Real beauty was my mom stroking her mom's hair and singing "Family of God" in her ear. Real beauty was evident in this woman who never complained about putting her life on hold for several months. As I watched Mom nurturing her mom during the days before Grandma's death, I knew this was true beauty in action.

—Calista Baker, Kansas

*This article first appeared in the May/June 2001 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





## Inner Beauty

Redefining "Beautiful"

### Reflect

- *Which of these women can you best relate to? Why?*
- *If you were asked to add your definition of true beauty to this list, what would it be?*
- *How would you counsel a young girl who thinks she isn't beautiful?*



## Additional Resources



**Beautiful Reflections** by Judy Kay Johnson (Xulon, 2002; 176 pages). This book is designed to give women a balanced perspective on both inner and outer beauty. Eight lessons from God's Word offer spiritual answers to character issues that rob a woman of her inner beauty.

**Beauty by the Book** by Nancy Stafford (Multnomah, 2001; 220 pages). Actress Nancy Stafford digs below our culture's fixation on outward appearance to show you that true beauty is more than skin-deep. In this book she bares her heart to readers, laying out the Scriptures, promises, and truths women need to know to find their true value.



## Inner Beauty

### Additional Resources

**Clothed in Purple: Becoming a Woman of Inner Beauty** by Frances Simpson (Beacon Hill, 1991; 136 pages). From an assortment of everyday happenings, interesting illustrations, and Bible stories, *Clothed in Purple* reveals a life-style outlined by God. Prov. 31:10-31 describes the woman of noble character, and "her clothing is silk and purple" (v. 22). The book shows women how to become clothed appropriately with grace and inner beauty.

**Designed by God: Honest Talk About Beauty, Modesty, and Self-Image** by Regina Franklin (Discovery House, 2006; 144 pages). Whether she's online chatting with friends, reading a magazine, or watching her favorite television show, today's young woman faces a constant barrage of guarantees that she can become prettier, skinnier, sexier. Franklin speaks honestly but sensitively to young women about who God created them to be.

**Discover Your Inner Beauty** by Lisa Bevere (Strang, 2002; 96 pages). This book reveals that God wants to awaken you to your inner beauty! God sees deep within and loves the real you. Allow God to open your eyes to see your true beauty within - that which reflects the beauty of His holiness.

**Secrets of Inner Beauty** by Michelle Medlock Adams (Barbour, 2005; 192 pages). While society obsesses over the outward beauty of a privileged few—the models, actresses, and jet-setters of the world—God quietly reminds His daughters that beauty is truly





## Inner Beauty

### Additional Resources

more than skin deep. These devotional readings offer encouragement and affirmation to women who often struggle with the unrealistic physical demands of today's culture.

**Who Calls Me Beautiful? Finding Our True Image in the Mirror of God** by Regina Franklin (Discovery House, 2004; 138 pages). In this book Franklin skillfully chips away at the belief that a woman's body is more important than her character.



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