

THE MAIN THING:

We can pursue the world's standards of beauty and suffer discord, insecurity, pain, and despair, or we can make the daily choice to submit to Christ and allow the unfading beauty of God to be displayed in our lives.

PURSUER RELATIONSHIP: *Connect and pray as a group*

1. What is a funny memory that you have about your mother?
2. What is the most ludicrous message about beauty that you've seen?

PURSUER GOD: *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

Observation and Reflection

1. Read Proverbs 18:21. What personal comments that you heard in your youth still bear fruit today?
2. What are the inward and outward aspects of beauty in Proverbs 31:21-31?
3. How does that compare with 1 Peter 3:3-4?

Application

1. How would you apply this statement: *How you look or dress can be a reflection of how you believe your heavenly Father sees you.*
2. In same gender groups of 2 or 3, share how you want to escape the lie and pursue the truth about your own beauty and dignity in Christ.

For further reference

<http://www.drjamesdobson.org/articles/defending-righteousness/the-obsession-with-beauty>

<https://www.ficm.org/free-stuff/> Click on "Truth Statements" for a download of scripture teachings on "Who I am in Christ."

THE WORD (NIV)

Proverbs 18:21

²¹ The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Proverbs 31:21–31

²¹ When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. ²² She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple. ²³ Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. ²⁵ She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. ²⁶ She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. ²⁷ She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. ²⁸ Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ²⁹ "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." ³⁰ Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. ³¹ Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

1 Peter 3:3–4

³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

A woman of true beauty is a woman who has an eternal perspective on life, and who in the depths of her soul is at rest.

- Dr. Henry Schorr

How a woman understands and deals with the issue of beauty – and for men that of attractiveness – tends to affect her self-confidence and her relationship with God and others. There are two considerations that we need to look at. Firstly, what the world says about beauty and secondly, what the Word of God says about beauty. One of the most highly valued personal attributes in our culture today is that of physical attractiveness. This is learned early in life from the messages that we receive from others and our culture in general. The message of a mother telling their daughter that she is beautiful will be rejected as a lie should that mother see herself as unattractive or inadequate (or be told that by her husband) when the daughter feels her mother is beautiful. A father neglectful in giving sincere affirmation toward his daughter risks leaving a huge void in her life. Nancy Friday: “There is nothing like the mystery of an absent father to addict you to the loving gaze of men.” Conversely if the parents’ identity and value comes from what God says they are, this will be passed on, and affirmations toward their daughter’s beauty and femininity will be accepted by her.

Society puts forth messages of what is desired and expected of a woman of beauty – even from Fairy Tales! The message is: really worthy people are beautiful. Such societal emphasis on physical attractiveness is a by-product of the sexual revolution of the 1960’s. The more a culture focuses on sex, the more it will reward beauty – and punish unattractiveness. Excess weight affects not just our self-esteem but our acceptance by others. Moreover, it only takes one vicious comment from a peer to inflict long-lasting damage to our egos. Such a comment can be at the heart of our insecurity and inferiority ever after (Prov 18:21). The pressure to be attractive may fall on men and women, but women especially are bombarded with the message that to be worthwhile you must be beautiful. It is because external beauty carries such power in our culture that many women are obsessed with the desire to be seen as beautiful and would choose beauty over brains if given that choice. Thus cosmetics, operations and diets are the order of the day. To find approval many women are denying themselves the joy of food that is a gift of God (Ecclesiastes 2:24).

Women, do you compare yourselves unfavorably with other women? Do you always feel you need to be on a diet? Are you ashamed of certain parts of your body? How closely is your identity, sexual desirability or self-confidence linked to how you look? Men, do you work out to stay in shape or to impress others? How closely is your identity or self-confidence linked to how you look? Do you judge women, or your spouse, on the basis of how physically attractive they are? If so, you are being deceived by our culture and what it says about what makes a person worthwhile.

The Bible says that we are to be transformed by embracing what your creator says about who you are rather than what the culture says (Rom 12:2). Proverbs 31 describes the qualities of a godly woman rather than one particular woman. What can we learn from this?

1. Be concerned about your appearance. The Proverbs 31 woman put effort and money into how she looked (vs 22). The Bible does not condemn physical beauty or suggest that your outward appearance doesn’t matter, but commends a woman who seeks to make herself attractive in her grooming, in the clothes she wears, in her diet and exercise – so long as it does not become an obsession.
2. Don’t make your appearance an idol. Charm is deceptive (vs 30). True beauty flows from the inside out and this will not become a reality if we focus primarily on our external appearance and put our trust in these things. It requires that we daily surrender, pursue and grow in our relationship with God (1 Peter 3:3-4). Clothing communicates. What are we saying through what we wear? This is true for both women and men. Beauty is fleeting; it will not last. Accident, illness or aging will rob you of external beauty (Ps 90:12). But a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised (vs 30). This means the wise and praiseworthy person is he/she who believes God in what really matters in life, and trusts God in what really makes a life attractive. Knowing our days are numbered reminds us not to put our trust in the temporary things in life (possessions, positions, pleasures or our bodies) but in God and the eternal things of God.
3. True beauty flows from within. (1 Peter 3:3-4, 6) It is an unfading beauty – an inner-spiritual spirit-filled attractiveness - that never goes out of style or needs replacing. ‘Gentle’ here means to not have a self-centered, demanding, argumentative spirit but a meek spirit led moment by moment by the Holy Spirit. ‘Quiet’ means tranquil and undisturbed. It is a life that trusts God and rests in Him by doing what is right and not giving way to fear. Fear can be the ‘what if’s’ of life or being rattled by problems, or endless striving and trying to control it all. This only invites turmoil into a woman’s home and may choke out the beautiful person God created her to be. Together, a gentle and quiet spirit is to have a heart of faith that trusts and abides in God, and a spirit that rests in His love and is filled with His peace – and who invites others around her to rest as well and to be who God made them to be. Jesus was not attractive yet people wanted to be near Him because He had something flowing out of Him – the character of His Father (Isaiah 53:2). We are God’s image-bearers on earth no matter what size we are.
4. True beauty flows from those who base their identity in Christ. (Heb 4:16) Apart from Jesus your identity will be based on what everyone else says about you. Yet opinions change often. Beauty is seen differently in other cultures. Put your trust in God and believe what He says you are. That is the only way your identity cannot be shaken or taken from you. Trusting in God sets you free from the labels others try to put on you. When God looks at you He says, “Despite what others may say about you, you are my beloved son or daughter.” He sees His precious child, who through Jesus, is totally forgiven, righteous and perfect in His sight, not because you are perfect but because we are in Christ and Christ is in us – and He is perfect. He purposefully created you and you are precious to Him. We all long for significance. True significance is found in God alone and not through our accomplishments, wealth, work or attractiveness. You don’t have to manufacture your own significance. It’s been granted to you in Jesus Christ.

We each have the choice of whether we are going to trust in the world or the Word of God, in culture or in Christ. As you live in humble dependence on Jesus, you can trust Jesus to live His life through you. Jesus is alive in you. Believe who He says you are and surrender your life to Him, and let Him live His life through you.