

In Search of the Perfect Body

✗ *Having the shape of your dreams isn't your ticket to happiness. It's learning to love the skin you're in.*

Imagine

a world where everyone looks like Barbie and Ken. Try to imagine

yourself as a Barbie, talking to the other Barbies and Kens.

Would you like yourself? Would you think you were as pretty as the other Barbies? Would you be envious of them?

Would

everyone in the group be happy with how they look? Or would some be

depressed, struggling with a negative body image? Would others feel

better than everyone else based on how they look?

It

wouldn't take long for the individuals to find a way to look different

from the rest of the group. The girls who needed to think of themselves

as better than the others would do their hair in a different way to try

to validate their importance.

People

would pierce and tattoo, cut and shave—anything to look unique and

different from one another. Even if we all looked exactly the same, our

inner faults would reveal our imperfection.

Perfection

isn't achieved through having flat abs or firm breasts. In

fact, we can
never achieve perfection when it comes to our bodies. So why
do we
strive so hard to attain it?

MEASURING UP

If
you want to know to what extent perfectionism influences your
thinking
about your body image, consider the following statements.
Which ones do
you think are true?

- Beautiful people have the best lives.
- I know that if people see me before I get myself fixed up, they won't like me.
- How people look reflects how valuable they are to society.
- The way I look is a big reason I haven't achieved what I've wanted to in life.
- The only way I could ever be happy with the way I look is if I could change several of my physical characteristics.
- If I can get my looks right, then I can have the relationships, job, joy and peace I want.
- I am ashamed of how I look.

Actually,
all these statements represent wrong assumptions that affect
our body
images negatively. If you buy into any of them, perhaps it's
time to
think about what fuels your perfectionism about your body.

The
quest for perfection goes back to the time before the first
man and
woman were created. The true roots of a poor body image are
found in the
same source as misinformation and self-deception: Satan.

Satan

is not called the father of perfectionism in the Bible, but he tempts

us to strive for this goal regarding our bodies. According to Ezekiel

28, God made Satan in awesome beauty and splendor. He was the model of

perfection—the measuring stick for what is beautiful in God's creation

(see vv. 11-15).

God didn't

make Satan only beautiful, though; He also made him wise. But Satan did

not use his wisdom to glorify God (see Ezek. 28:17). The pride he took

in his own beauty corrupted his wisdom and caused him to think he could

glorify himself and become more important than he already was by

completely taking over God's kingdom (see Is. 14:13-14).

Evidently,

after Satan was cast down to Earth, he still desired to use wisdom and

beauty for influence. When he came in the form of an animal to tempt the

man and woman, he chose the serpent (see Gen. 3:1-15).

The

serpent was the craftiest of all the wild animals. When God judged the

serpent, He consigned him to crawling on his belly and eating dust

throughout his existence on Earth (see v. 14).

Although

he can disguise himself as an angel of light, he has lost all

the
beauty that once adorned his being. He was originally a bright
and
morning star in heaven, but he will eventually be cast down to
the grave
with maggots and worms (see Is. 14:11-12).

I
believe that poor body image is closely related to original
sin by way
of the originator of sin, Satan himself. The spiritual root of
all body
image struggles is disapproving of the way God made you.

I
don't know anyone who struggles with a poor body image who
would say
that she desires to be beautiful so she can worship God more
fully.
However, in our flesh, each of us desires to be accepted, to
be better
than others and to stand out.

Our
striving for acceptance and recognition—and resulting
failure—is the
cause of body loathing. We see where we fall short in the
“looks
department” and blame God for making us the way we are.

There
is nothing Satan would enjoy more than getting women to feel
ugly and
useless in God's kingdom. But we need to see that there is
only one way
to authentic perfection, and that is through Jesus Christ.

The

perfection He brings is not the same kind we are seeking in our physical bodies. The essence of perfection is sinlessness, which we will ultimately experience in heaven.

When you feel defeated and ugly, it holds you back spiritually. That is why it is important to see how your negative body image developed. Then you can allow God to reveal the beauty He created in you.

If you don't realize God's beauty in you, you will remain at your level of self-loathing. You'll keep trying endless ways to fix your body flaws or continue to build up new reasons to hate your body. This may lead to a deeper trap of depression, anxiety, eating disorders and the like.

TAKING INVENTORY

What is "body image," and how does it develop? Body image, which changes from day to day, is what you think you look like on the outside.

Physical comparisons go through your mind every day, but you aren't always aware of them and how they affect you. You've developed your opinions about your body based on various sense information you have received and experiences you have had through the years. The data you've

gathered,
which consists of visual information (what you see); mental
information
(what you think about what you see); kinetic information (how
your body
functions and moves); and historical information (what you
remember
about how others have reacted to your body), sums up your body
image.

The following exercise will help you evaluate what your body
image is right now:

1. Visual. List your top five positive and negative physical
characteristics.
2. Mental. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being "I am very satisfied
with how I look," write down how you evaluate your looks right
now.
3. Emotional. Write down the following sentence and the
feeling or
feelings that best describe you: "When I look at myself in the
mirror, I
feel...."
4. Kinetic. Name at least one activity you enjoy participating
in with your body. "I appreciate that with my body I can...."
5. Historical. Write the statement below that is most true of
your experiences:

- I remember very few times when I felt a great deal of shame
about my
body either because of what others said about me or because I
wanted to
do something I couldn't do.

- I can recall at least five significant times that I felt
ashamed about
my body because of others' comments or actions toward me.
- I have had considerably more negative comments about or

actions toward my body than positive comments or actions.

It's critical for you to acknowledge how often your negative body image has been reinforced during your lifetime. When a statement is reinforced over and over, it takes on a sense of truth, even if it is not true.

Negative feelings, experiences and comments together act as blinders to prevent you from seeing who you really are. But you are not bound to the wrong image you have of yourself.

END THE CYCLE

As you look back over your responses, the impact of your experiences on your body image will become more obvious to you.

For example, Susan, a 16-year-old bulimic, said her most positive feature was her brown eyes, and the most negative, her big bottom.

Susan remembered that her dad used to sing to her about her big brown eyes and that the guys in the cafeteria often put girls down about their backsides. The more negative the experiences related to your body have been, the more self- and body-rejecting you are.

But you do not have to be imprisoned by these experiences. In fact, just

bringing them into your conscious awareness gives you power over them
and the negative influence they have on how you see yourself.

We
are fooling ourselves if we believe having the perfect looks will make
us happy inside. Some of the world's most beautiful people are the ones
most torn by heartache, broken relationships and even poor body image.
The secret to true beauty is being at peace with who you are.

I
must admit that as a mother of a teen myself, I still feel the pressure
to look good. When I find myself succumbing, I remember that the secret
to overcoming a negative body image is letting God show me my true
beauty.

It's great to know
the pressure to look good doesn't have to rule my life. Celebrating
rather than debasing my body is a wonderful way to live.

Prayer
is a powerful tool in getting free from the trap of negative body
image. Right now, commit your heart through prayer to finding and doing
what God says is best. Pray this prayer from your heart:

*Dear heavenly Father and Creator of my body, I recognize that I struggle
to know and live out what is truly perfect. I can see how my heart is*

drawn to Satan's message that perfectionism is the answer.

*I
can easily get focused on wanting perfect beauty rather than
wanting
You. In the name of Jesus Christ I stand against the world of
advertising, diet, the beauty industry, my vanity and Satan
himself.*

*I
resist every force that would seek to distract me from who I
really am
and what You desire for me to do in and through this body You
gave me. I
reject the distorted concepts and ideas that make body
perfection sound
plausible and desirable.*

*I
oppose every attempt to keep me from knowing full fellowship
with You. I
open my heart to be transformed into true perfection through
Jesus
Christ. Amen.*

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