

Why Social Media Can Be Harmful

Editor's note: The following dialogue came from an interview with Diane Morrow about Elizabeth Oates book If You Could See as Jesus Sees.

Q: *If You Could See as Jesus Sees* was written to reach women who struggle with self-worth. How common is this problem?

I think most women—from ages ten to one hundred—wrestle with feelings of inadequacy, doubt, worthlessness, hopelessness, and even self-loathing at some point in their lives. We scorn our bodies, our faces, or our hair. Maybe we even dislike ourselves at our core: our personalities, our gifts, our talents, and our souls. So we spend days, if not years, comparing ourselves to our friends or media celebrities and daydreaming about a different life. Eventually, we morph into an existence vaguely similar to ourselves, yet not quite us.

We alter our behavior to please others. We dress like our friends or emulate what we see in *InStyle* magazine. We may even change our appearance through plastic surgery. Before we know it, we are just an empty shell of our true selves, mere impostors of the women God created.

The details vary from woman to woman. Yet, for each of us, a common thread weaves through our stories: the grand story of the fall. Think back to Eve in the Garden of Eden. She lived in paradise with her loving husband, Adam, and her devoted God. They enjoyed constant fellowship with their Creator. Then the deceitful serpent entered the stage. Listening to his empty promises and twisted propaganda, Eve succumbed to his lies, and women have been believing those lies ever since. We view ourselves through our own distorted lenses of self-loathing, ugliness, shame, and discontentment instead of

Jesus' lenses of love, beauty, redemption, and generosity.

Q: The topic of social media comes up often in this book. How do Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media sites negatively affect some women?

A: Have you ever mindlessly surfed Facebook, only to shut your laptop, feeling lonely, useless, and discouraged? It's tough not to succumb to jealousy, envy, greed—and even despair—when we are inundated with our friends' vacation photos, dream homes, new cars, job promotions, and all the other exciting things people want to celebrate. We are left feeling as if we are living a less-than-stellar life. For the woman who already struggles with a negative self-image, those posts are a constant reminder of the many ways she doesn't measure up.

Social media has become a driving force in our culture, but it doesn't reflect reality. It's the highlight reel. We see people living life seamlessly—the perfect family, the perfect house, the perfect job, the perfect faith—and we wonder, “What am I doing wrong? Why am I not married yet? Why am I not pregnant yet? Why don't I live in my dream home?”

What we don't see underneath those beaming Facebook posts is the crumbling marriage, the house in foreclosure, the credit card debt, and the I'll-show-up-for-church-on-Sunday-morning-but-don't-you-dare-ask-me-to-do-to-anything-riskier kind of faith.

Q: According to statistics you quote in *If You Could See as Jesus Sees*, only 2% of women believe they are beautiful. What is God's view of beauty? What are some helpful exercises women can do to banish their negative self-talk regarding their appearance?

Beauty is not what we look like, but who we look like. The more we look like Jesus, the more beautiful we are. True beauty comes from living out our faith and living out the plans God has for us. Just as a mother dotes on her newborn

baby's pink, wrinkly, soft, squishy flesh, God delights in us. God knows you are the most beautiful, radiant, flawless, creature He has ever created.

So the question we need to ask ourselves is, "Do I believe God is a truth teller? Or do I believe God is a liar?" If you believe God is truthful, then you must believe Him when He says you are beautiful. Why? Because the Bible tells us we are "wonderfully made" unique creations. Every time someone—whether our husband, our friend, or our parent—gives us a compliment and we turn it down, we call that person a liar. Every time we criticize ourselves, we call God a liar. To really understand the devastating effects of negative self-talk, try this exercise:

Make a list of the negative things you tell yourself about the way you look. For example, "My thighs are huge. I really hate them." Then replace "my" with the name of a close friend: "Kate's thighs are huge. I really hate them." You would never say such cruel things to someone else. It's just as hurtful—and sinful—when you say them to yourself.

Q: You identify shame as one of the factors that keeps women trapped in their negative self-image. What are some common reasons women feel ashamed? How can they break free from the shame trap?

A: Shame is the feeling that because there is something wrong with us, we don't deserve to be loved. It is almost always tied to an element of secrecy. We try to hide those flaws, so we won't be rejected. We feel shame for things both big and small, both past and present, both within and beyond our control.

Some common reasons include: missed opportunities, poor choices, sexual impurity, eating disorders, sexual abuse/sexual assault, addictions, family dysfunction, failure, and socioeconomic status. Sadly, the church has sometimes

contributed to that sense of shame, particularly concerning the issue of purity. Women who have made the wrong choice in the past feel like “damaged goods.” Hopefully, we will do a better job with my daughter’s generation.

The only way I know to move past those feelings of shame is to find someone you can trust and talk about your story. Shame’s power depends on secrecy and darkness. When we step into the light, we can experience life through God’s lens of redemption.

Q: In *If You Could See As Jesus Sees*, you contrast our feelings of discontentment with God’s character of generosity. Why do you think we so often struggle in this area? What does our lack of contentment cost us?

A: A popular quote flooding Instagram and Pinterest reads, “Her success is not your failure.” What wise words for today’s woman. Have you watched someone in your own life receive something you wanted, something you thought you deserved and allowed your greed to run your life?

Maybe a coworker received that sought-after promotion. Maybe a friend moved into your dream home. Maybe you have played the part of the bridesmaid but never the bride.

When we look at life through Jesus’ lens of generosity, we realize the many blessings He bestows on you and me and everyone else who doesn’t deserve them. Anytime we are left feeling slighted, upstaged, or empty-handed, we have a choice to make: give ourselves over to our discontentment, or submit to a spirit of generosity, knowing that all we have received is an open-handed gift from our Savior.

When discontentment wells up in our hearts, it eclipses all the goodness and beauty that used to reside there. We live in darkness, suffering from temporary memory loss and forgetting the many ways in which God has met our needs—and wants—in the past.