

Appearances Can Be Deceiving

☒ Looks can be deceiving, the old adage goes. It's true: The outside is not a very reliable indicator of our inward nature. Sometimes the outward even contradicts the inward. But that doesn't stop us from being a people who are strongly influenced by what we see.

Only by the Spirit can we look beyond the obvious and perceive the hidden. As Scripture tells us, man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart (see 1 Sam. 16:7).

I learned early on the pain of being judged by the human perspective of outward appearance. When I was 5, I lost my right eye to cancer. Before the surgery, everywhere my parents took me, people would stop them and comment, "What a pretty little girl! What beautiful eyes!"

Such compliments always made me uncomfortable when I was young. I was confused because the people looked at *me*, but talked about me to my parents. I would just stand there as my mother or father collected the compliments on my behalf. Then one of my parents would inevitably prompt, "What do you say?"

I'd murmur, "Thank you," while dropping my head or looking away.

I didn't care about being called pretty. To me, pretty was almost an insult. I wanted someone to say, "What an incredible tree-climber you have there!" or "She swims like a fish!"

That was me. *Pretty* was girlish, and I was an avowed *tomboy*!

When my eye was removed, the majority of my compliments ceased. Instead, people made strange faces.

They studied me from a distance, but still looked a little closer than was comfortable for me. They'd drop their voices to a whisper and ask my mother, "How is she?"

I wanted to yell, "I'm fine. I'm not my eye! I'm not weak; I'm still the same!"

My surgery took place during the school year. The kids at school called me "one-eye" and "Cyclops." Many days I ran the two miles home from grade school while kids jeered at me from the opposite side of the street.

I pretended I couldn't hear them and held back my tears until I was home. My mother held me and told me kids this age were cruel, assuring me that when I grew up it would not be like this.

Even at 5, I knew I was not the way I was perceived. I fought against the concept that I could be measured by how I looked. But later in life I embraced this shallow standard.

As children we are not immediately indoctrinated by cultural influences. These forces take some time to mold the metal of our souls. But once the metal is forged, it cools quickly into a hard, rigid standard by which we continually measure ourselves and others.

It is not long before little girls can't wait to be grown-ups. They long to adorn themselves in the outward accessories of makeup and jewelry. They play dress-up and put on cosmetics when they are possibly at their prettiest.

Soon they are teens, and they dabble daily in what was once only play. They begin to think they are not pretty without makeup, and what was once reserved for special occasions becomes a daily mandatory ritual. They want to look and act older.

Then something dreadful happens. They finally reach the age they had longed to achieve, and now they are bothered with the worry of getting old. If 16 to 26 is the optimum age range, it is a very short time in the whole scheme of life. As young women approach 30, they no longer want to look older—they want

to look *younger*!

This is a no-win situation for women. Men don't seem to wrestle with their age quite as much.

Their maturing process is more normal. They want to grow up and become independent, but then they don't wig out because they look older!

Some women even lie about their age or go to great lengths to hide it. Not content to look great at their real age, they want to appear younger *and* wiser.

But youth and wisdom do not often go together. Wisdom comes with time, obedience and application of truth. Often we do not have access to these insights until we are old enough to appreciate their importance.

A Precious Adornment

Young women make the mistake of putting their trust in their faces or forms while neglecting their incorruptible assets. We all know the verse in 1 Peter 3:3-4: "Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" (NKJV).

God admonishes us not to allow our adornment to be merely outward or superficial. He is not telling us not to adorn ourselves. He is not advocating the neglect of our hair, the wearing of rags or the absence of jewelry.

But the emphasis of our adornment should be on the inside, not the outside. He wants us to adorn our hearts with His unfading, quiet and gentle beauty. It doesn't age, can't be stolen and doesn't turn gray.

Because God's perspective is eternity, He is letting us in on His secret beauty prescription. It is an intimate beauty, one reserved for the eyes of God.

When you have that inner peace and rest, the world will notice it more than they'll notice your newest designer outfit, hair color or jewelry. Those in the world have all those outward things, but what they don't have is peace, "which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Pet. 3:4, NIV).

People in the world have a confused standard for value and worth. They drape themselves to hide their emptiness while we purify ourselves to gain transparency. They hide while we shine.

Unfortunately, we have allowed the marketing of the world's illusions to influence our outward projections and veil our inward reflection.

Because we have judged by appearances, we often misjudge. Adornment is like a beautiful glass bowl that holds wax fruit. It is exquisitely crafted and forged of cut crystal, yet holds in its beauty fruit that is artificial and tasteless. The fruit may look initially inviting because it is surrounded by outward beauty, but if handled or sampled, the fruit will soon be revealed as worthless.

Somewhere in the pantry there is a worn and tattered crate that holds real produce. It is not beautiful, yet it bears what is delicious, fresh and life-giving. If you were hungry—hungry for truth, hungry for the real—you'd turn from the beauty of the cut crystal bowl filled with artificial fruit and head for the useful, fruitful crate.

God judges us by our *fruit*, not our *fruit bowls*. He wants our inner adornment to be fresh and useful, not cold and beautiful yet artificial.

Let us not judge others by the packaging of outward

appearances. And let us develop that inward beauty that not only shines in bright contrast to the appearances of the world, but also attracts the very heart of God.

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