

# Wired to Admire

Hard-wired into man's genetic code is a strong desire for beauty.

But unrealistic expectations are short-circuiting God's design.

Let's face it, there's just something wired into the male psyche that causes the passionate admiration and pursuit of beauty.

Virtually every man has at least once in his lifetime fantasized about snagging the "perfect woman." And while any gathering of red-blooded males might stir up a healthy argument over which woman deserves the title, author and Christian "sexpert" Doug Rosenau says that most men have a hard time narrowing it down to one person.

"The confusion I see in guys is that they have about three or four different ideas of a perfect woman," Rosenau says. "They're confused as to which one is the one that they really would like."

This can make the male sex drive feel like a cruel, cosmic joke. But according to Bob Gresh, author of *Who Moved the Goal Post? 7 Winning Strategies in the Sexual Integrity Gameplan*, God's intent is clear.

"God set up a strong sexual drive in men toward women so that He can show the portrait of His love for us and the bride of Christ," Gresh says. "Being a 'bride' isn't something that a lot of men identify with, but it's a word picture that's important to show us how much God loves us and desires us as much as we do a woman that loves us."

## **An Endless Quest?**

Doug Weiss, executive director of Heart to Heart Counseling Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, agrees that the male quest for visual perfection comes directly from God and goes well beyond appreciation for the female form.

“We [guys] see beauty in nice cars, big trucks and architectural buildings,” Weiss says. “God Himself loves beauty. We’re like Him in that we see beauty, and we enjoy beauty.”

Greg Smalley, president of Today’s Family, adds that God built this into a man’s genetic code.

“It’s so important for guys to recognize that God created us to be attracted to the opposite sex,” Smalley says. “There’s a biological way that God designed us to be pleased by the opposite sex. There’s this natural biological drawing toward women so that our species can continue.”

This issue is not all physical, though. According to renowned author and pastor Jack Hayford, a man’s visually stimulated behaviors can have intense, spiritual ramifications: “I think that beauty in a woman is intended to attract a man to an intimacy of relationship at a human level that precisely parallels the intimacy that we’re intended to know with God,” Hayford says.

Unfortunately, for many men, this pursuit of beauty has become a substitute for the pursuit of an intimate relationship with God. Smalley points out that there are two motivating factors that drive men in this endless quest: “One is the fear of loss, then the other one is the desire for gain,” he says.

“There’s a control element. We’ll do anything to control our own fate in life. We pursue women as a way to not feel alone. Beauty is pleasing to the eye. There’s that desire for gain.”

And that’s where most men get it wrong, making their pursuit of beauty more about personal pride instead of focusing the

awe and appreciation back toward heaven.

“The reason [God] does anything good is to point us back to Himself,” says Joshua Harris, author of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. “The gratefulness that we feel for His creation, for just the wonder, the beauty of a woman, is ultimately to lead us to worship Him.”

## **Eye of the Beholder**

While the male genetic code hasn't changed much over time, technology certainly has. Thanks to publications such as *Playboy* and *Maxim*, along with the Internet and cable television, the floodgates of sensual imagery have been unleashed on our neural pathways.

Author Stephen Arterburn has chronicled this malicious onslaught on the mind in his *Every Man's Battle* series. While men have always pursued beauty, the perception and expectation used to be much simpler.

“I think the definition of a beautiful woman in the mind of most men years ago was ‘naked,’” says Arterburn, co-author of *Every Man's Marriage*. “There was not so much focus on the symmetry of the face, the millimeters between the bridge of the nose and the lips. There wasn't the classic beauty. It was just the female form, and that was attractive and beautiful to a man.”

Doug Weiss adds that this sans mass media society allowed for a much purer definition of beauty.

“[Women] looked real back then,” he says. “There wasn't plastic surgery. There wasn't air brushing. There wasn't all of the makeup. They had fat, and it was all OK. Now [men] want women ... with no body fat and ripped abs.”

Men today now have heightened expectations for what makes a woman beautiful. Problem is, these expectations are

unrealistic.

Dannah Gresh, the wife of Bob Gresh and author of *And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity*, points out that the average model is 23 percent thinner than the average woman.

“It’s an unattainable factor,” she says. “When you add Photoshop and all the lights and cameras and makeup, it’s just not realistic. It’s not going to happen.”

The problem doesn’t just affect men; it also creates a parallel set of problems for women who are trying unsuccessfully to keep up with the culture’s constantly changing standards of beauty.

Bob Gresh adds that both men and women need to educate themselves on how the media affects their perceptions of beauty. “The thing that really frustrates me is that even the models don’t look like models!” he says. “Even these bodies aren’t real. It’s a total figment of a graphic imagination.”

Weiss agrees: “Those images are all plastic-surgery images. They’re not the real thing. What’s happening is, we no longer look for the real thing; we want the object thing, and women are willing to go along with that to capture a man. Men like that. They want this porn-star-type woman.”

This mainstreaming of the porn culture concerns Joshua Harris. He says the divide between the biblical definition of beauty and the mainstream definition has widened, leaving men unable to decipher between what’s fake and what’s real. In his new book, *Not Even a Hint: Guarding Your Heart Against Lust*, Harris extols the virtues of abstaining from any images that might cause impure thoughts.

“Our definition of beauty has been so twisted and exploited by pornography,” Harris says. “The pursuit of beauty apart from the pursuit of goodness quickly becomes something that’s very

twisted and ugly. It actually ruins our ability to enjoy true beauty.”

## **Retrain Your Brain**

With the moral decline of network television, and the widespread access to Internet porn and sexually charged men’s magazines, the average man might cave into the idea that reclaiming a biblical perspective on beauty is a lost cause. Not so, says Arterburn, whose books specifically target men who struggle with this issue.

“If [men] will starve their eyes of the images that society puts out there, it will help readjust their expectations of a woman and what beauty is in a woman,” Arterburn says.

“If you’re filling your mind with Internet and magazines and Victoria’s Secret catalogs, your image of beauty is so distorted. When you stop looking, when you start bouncing your eyes away from all of that, your sense of beauty settles down to a more normal place. You really can be satisfied and fulfilled with the real thing that is much less perfect.”

Jack Hayford and his wife, Anna, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary in July. His straightforward philosophy pulls no punches and requires a man to resist even subtle temptations, such as friendly flirtations at work that might seem harmless.

“I need to have eyes only for my wife,” Hayford says. “I am persuaded that there is a spiritual dynamic in wandering eyes. It literally reduces and extracts something from the potential of his wife’s beauty. Not only in his eyes, but also in her literal capacity to become beautiful.”

Once a man has taken the steps to cleanse his mental palate of the world’s view of beauty, he must next replace that skewed perspective with a God-centered definition.

“Beauty always has to be tied to a reflection of God’s character,” Joshua Harris says. “Separated from that, it quickly becomes perverted.

“When we understand the values and the attributes that God values, like in Proverbs 31, I think we can as men begin to, by avoiding those things that are wrong and by really meditating on the goodness of a woman’s character, reprogram our definition of beauty.”

Kenny Luck, director of Every Man Ministries and author of *Being God’s Man by Understanding a Woman’s Heart*, gives some specific advice on how a man can begin retraining his brain in an effort to see beauty through God’s eyes instead of the world’s filter.

“You have to assign a higher value to identity and character in a woman,” Luck says. “If you were searching for qualities, you’d want to search the inward qualities first. Who is she? Does she view herself as God’s woman or the world’s woman? Is she always a victim of the process of comparison and overemphasis on appearance and externals?”

Those questions will eventually lead the earnest seeker to the elusive perfect woman, a woman whom Luck describes as “the one that really sees herself as God’s woman and has accountability to Him to be all that He created her to be.”

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Chad Bonham and his wife, Amy, reside in Broken Arrow, Okla. Chad is an author and producer of *The ProFILES* sports TV program.