

Chapter 1

Beauty Can be Such a Crock

(Judging by Appearance)

Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful face on an empty head.

PROVERBS 11:22, MSG

Okay girlfriend, spill:

1. Do you currently own more than three bottles of skin moisturizer?
2. Have you weighed yourself within the last week?
3. Have you ever been embarrassed by your pants size?
4. Do you enjoy reading fashion magazines?
5. Are you unhappy with your figure?
6. Is there a celebrity you wish you looked more like?
7. Do you own more than four tubes of lipstick?
8. Have you used more than three different hair products during the past month?
9. Do you feel self-conscious if you leave the house without your make-up?
10. Have you had or ever considered having cosmetic surgery?
11. Do you have your nails done more than twice a year?
12. Have you bought a new outfit during the last month?

If you answered yes to three or more of these questions, I think it's safe to say that you, like most women, have an active interest in your appearance. You've actually invested in beautification with your money, time and effort. You want to shine, baby, and positively influence the way others think of you.

Well I'm here to tell you there's nothing wrong with that.

The God of Beauty created us women with an appreciation for beauty in our spirits – a glorious sunset, the tiny fingers of a newborn baby, sunlight sparkling like jewels on a lake, snow-capped mountaintops. We're drawn to beauty; we yearn to drink it in as it captivates our minds, nourishes our souls, even inspires our hearts. We want to experience beauty – to enjoy it, create it, *be* it. So we devote our energies, resources and time to making ourselves more beautiful.

Or at least how we *think* others perceive beauty.

But you and I both know that perceptions can be deceiving, especially when we judge solely by appearance. Need proof? What are your first thoughts when you encounter a dirty, unkempt bag lady on the street? How about the highly fashionable socialite in this year's Prada? The tattooed teenage boy in his hulking monster truck cutting you off in traffic? The meticulously groomed young man in a lab coat? The six-foot model with her Botox-perfect complexion and surgically enhanced DD chest? Or the grossly overweight man crowding you in the elevator?

Even when we know better, we still tend to make snap judgments based on empirical evidence. We *diss* the one but respect the other before giving them a chance to prove themselves beneath the outside layer.

We don't bother to remove the wrapping paper before deciding whether we like the contents of the package.

Thankfully, Papa God doesn't think that way when he looks at us. “**The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart**” (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV). The gifts the Lord specifically gives each of us are rarely on the surface; they're virtues like discernment, kindness, or graciousness that He's lovingly nestled within our character. (We'll talk more about inner beauty later.)

So why do we spend so much time rewrapping and redecorating our customized gift package?

Because we want to *feel* better. Our Creator wired us so that how we look affects how we feel. There's no denying it. When we know we look good, we feel good! It's been that way from the beginning. I'll bet Eve turned the Garden of Eden upside down

searching for the perfect fig leaf and coordinated banana frond purse for the first fabulous ensemble.

Hey, don't you like to strut your stuff when you're sizzling?

I just adore showing off my newly polished toenails. I do indeed feel pretty, oh so pretty ... and I'm not above whirling about, flaunting my flashy feminine footsies under the wrinkled noses of whomever I can corner. I get giddy with girly-ness!

Well, what woman doesn't want to feel attractive, charming, fascinating?

When we feel pretty, we get a natural high, a boost in self-confidence. When we're at our physical best, our spirit soars and our attitude about beauty – I call this our *beaut-i-tude* - leaps into “I want more” mode. So we shop, highlight, polish, peel, gloss and push-up to get more. The problem arises when, like with any other addiction, we can't stop.

My friend Lydia, who is beauty queen gorgeous, found out the hard way how obsession with appearance can have disastrous consequences.

One day in 2004, Lydia began experiencing a low grade fever and blurred vision. Within hours, a rare virus had caused complete blindness in her left eye and a 50 percent loss of vision in her right eye. The consequences were thick glasses and a host of steroid-induced symptoms.

Lydia's long, lustrous chestnut hair fell out in clumps, resulting in use of a wig even all these years later. Her slim figure ballooned, and her skin aged so badly, Lydia says, “Even my knees wrinkled – nothing was untouched.”

How did Lydia, the enviable woman with perfect nails, flawless make-up and size 4 designer clothing, the woman whose self-esteem had always been wrapped up in glamour, deal with the sudden loss of the image for which she'd been so admired?

“My looks were the most important thing to me – my husband says that I was one of the vainest people he's ever met. And then God took my looks away. I was intensely angry at first, and miserable. But it's a funny thing – I've grown closer to Him in my dependency. Now I don't have to worry or think about myself so much. I can focus on more important things, like reaching out to others.”

Yes, when we're preoccupied with ourselves, we're distracted from our one true focus: our God and Savior Jesus Christ and the *people* He has brought into our lives to be our special ministry. Our passion is directed inward rather than outward. Our bodies become like a god to us. But our Creator had something very important to say about that: “**You shall have no other gods before Me**” (Exodus 20:3, NKJV), the very first of the Ten Commandments.

No other gods. Just the one true capitalized God. Jehovah. Yahweh. I Am. Not cheap fake gods like “Debbie Is,” or “Debbie's All That,” or “Debbie Wants to Be.”

Just the other day I had a stand-off with these false gods that I inadvertently worship. As I stood beside my car filling my gas tank after sweating off my make-up on the tennis court, I glanced up and caught sight of my reflection in the side window. Gasp! Was that really ME? It didn't look like the me in my head - the self-image I'd had of me for the past decade.

I mean how often do we *really* look at ourselves? For me, it's just a casual glance in a mirror a few times a day to make sure I don't have spinach between my teeth or my

hair isn't sticking out like a static-charged kitten. But there in the glaring light of day, every naked wrinkle (I call them laugh footprints), eye bag, gaping pore, discolored blemish, and saggy jowl showed up horrifyingly clear. My self-perception obviously hadn't marched to the same drummer as Father Time.

Talk about a harsh reality check. My hand flew to my cheek. "Am I ... am I ... *ugly*?"

My mind flashed back to a defining moment years before that I shared in my book, *Mom NEEDS Chocolate*. I was cowering on the high dive at the public pool as a chubby 12-year-old, self-conscious about my changing body and feeling exposed to the world in my bathing suit. Afraid to jump, I backed away from the edge of the platform, accidentally bumping an older girl waiting in line behind me.

"Go on, jump!" she snapped. I hesitated, trembling.

She shook her head with contempt. "You shouldn't be up here. You're chicken. You're fat. And you're *ugly*."

I jumped. It was the only way to hide the tears.

Fast forward forty years and I'm standing in a gas station still struggling with the same ugliness issue. But now I know that viewing myself as ugly is a slap in the face to my Creator, who made me in His image. If I'm ugly, what does that make Him?

After the initial shock (and a little chocolate comfort food), I truly didn't *feel* ugly. Despite the cold hard evidence glaring back at me, I actually started to feel, well, beautiful. It was then I realized that beauty is a linear process. The process goes like this:

- a) Because of the affirmation I receive from my close relationship with Papa God, I feel loved.

b) Because I know I'm loved, I feel valued.

c) Because I rest in the assurance that I'm valued, I feel beautiful.

Yes that's right. At the risk of you thinking I'm a blind, arrogant diva, I'll say it again: *I feel beautiful.*

And you can feel beautiful too! Despite any cold hard evidence you *think* you see in the mirror. That "evidence" is just a crock of lies the world imposes on you as its unattainable standard of beauty. NOBODY is naturally flaw-free, wrinkle-free, freckle-free, or sag-less.

This is your therapy for today: Repeat after me, "Mirrors are stupid!"

No, really, they are. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Mirrors don't *know* anything. They only tell us what we tell them to tell us. And *that* info is based on what others insist is acceptable or unacceptable through magazines, TV, infomercials, internet and movies. And remember, they're all trying to sell something!

How boring would we be without laugh-til-you-cry lines? And kindness crinkles? And love handles? And a little jowl jiggle to remind us of the scoop of Moose Tracks we shared with that distraught friend?

That's beauty by God's measuring standard, sister. All other rulers are just wood.

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"Wrinkles merely indicate where smiles have been."

~Mark Twain

Taming the Beast

1. What makes your beaut-i-tude (attitude about beauty) soar to 9 on a 1 to 10 scale? Art? Music? Nature? Shopping? New shoes?
2. It's been said, "Beauty may be skin deep, but ugly goes clear to the bone." Can you think of a time when you felt misjudged by your appearance? How about a time you misjudged someone else?
3. Are there any false beauty gods you've been worshiping lately? Don't sit there and shake your head, darlin'— dig deep and 'fess up. If I'm going to be *real*, you are too!