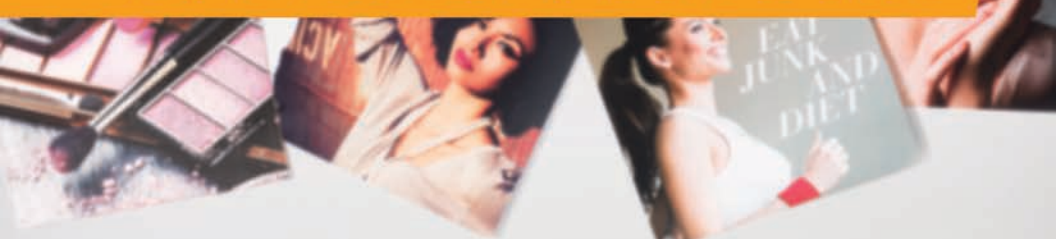




BACKWARDS

BEAUTY

HOW TO FEEL UGLY IN 10 SIMPLE STEPS



A Life, Love & God Book from JESSIE MINASSIAN



Jessie Minassian's *Backwards Beauty* is a must-read if you have a desire to overcome the bondage of insecurity and body image issues. She is very honest and open about her own battle, making this a captivating and easy read!

KYLIE BISUTTI

Author of I'm No Angel

Backwards Beauty is an enjoyable and insightful read. As a mother of a teenager, I found many profound truths and insights of great value in raising (or being) a teen in the very confusing climate of body image today. Excellent book.

CINDY MORGAN

Singer/songwriter, author of How Could I Ask for More

Jessie gets it—all the ways we can make ourselves feel ugly and what embracing our God-given beauty looks like. In this open, honest, entertaining book, you'll feel like you are sitting across the couch, under a blanket with a girl who's been there—talking about the power of our words, our dress, and our bodies—and you'll walk away feeling empowered to live a life of true, lasting beauty that grows more powerful—not less—with time. Thank you, Jessie, for using your voice to speak truth to a generation that needs it, and making us laugh along the way!

JENNIFER STRICKLAND

Author of More Beautiful Than You Know

No matter what we look like, for most of us girls, beauty can be the one ugly subject. Jessie tackles the subject of beauty with a unique brand of honesty, transparency, and wisdom. More importantly, she shows us that the secrets to true beauty are found in God's Word. For every girl who wants to feel beautiful, this book is a must-read.

ERIN DAVIS

Author, speaker, blogger

Jessie helps us move toward embracing our true beauty by backing us away from the crazy talk we don't even realize we believe. Listen in, hear yourself, and turn away from lies and toward freedom. Silence the hiss and become be-you-ti-ful you!

ELISA MORGAN

Speaker, author of *Hello, Beauty Full: Seeing Yourself as God Sees You*

BACKWARDS

BEAUTY

HOW TO FEEL UGLY IN 10 SIMPLE STEPS

A Life, Love & God Book from JESSIE MINASSIAN

NAVPRESS 

A NavPress resource published in alliance
with Tynedale House Publishers, Inc.



NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

For more information, visit www.NavPress.com.

Backwards Beauty: How to Feel Ugly in 10 Simple Steps

Copyright © 2016 by Jessie Minassian. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

NAV PRESS and the NAV PRESS logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

Cover design by Nicole Grimes

Cover photographs are the property of their respective copyright holders, and all rights are reserved. Girl lying in bed copyright © Image Source/Getty; girl in field copyright © letohin/Dollar Photo Club; exotic woman copyright © Paul Hill/Dollar Photo Club; woman with red lipstick copyright © konstandinos/Dollar Photo Club; retro woman copyright © chika_milan/Dollar Photo Club; black woman sitting copyright © kazzakova/Dollar Photo Club; friends' group copyright © Monkey Business/Dollar Photo Club; blonde woman copyright © Studio Kwadrat/Dollar Photo Club; woman with trendy glasses copyright © arthurhidden/Dollar Photo Club; African woman copyright © iconogenic/Dollar Photo Club; young woman copyright © deniskomarov/Dollar Photo Club; beautiful and fashionable women copyright © nuzza11/Dollar Photo Club; girl with fluttering hair copyright © nizas/Dollar Photo Club; woman with stylish makeup copyright © blackday/Dollar Photo Club; woman in gym copyright © Boggy/Dollar Photo Club.

Author photo taken by Open Sky Photography, copyright © 2014. All rights reserved.

The Team: Don Pape, Publisher; Caitlyn Carlson, Acquiring Editor; Nicci Hubert, Developmental Editor
Published in association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Associates, Inc.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *THE MESSAGE* by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked HCSB are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible,* copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible,* Holman CSB,* and HCSB* are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Some of the anecdotal illustrations in this book are true to life and are included with the permission of the persons involved. All other illustrations are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Minassian, Jessie.

Title: Backwards beauty : how to feel ugly in 10 simple steps / Jessie Minassian.

Description: Colorado Springs : NavPress, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015033531 | ISBN 9781612916293

Subjects: LCSH: Teenage girls—Religious life. | Christian girls—Religious life. | Beauty, Personal—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Self-perception in adolescence—Religious aspects—Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4551.3 .M54 2016 | DDC 248.8/33—dc23

LC record available at <http://lccn.loc.gov/2015033531>

Printed in the United States of America

22	21	20	19	18	17	16
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

the Lord doesn't
see things the
way you see them.
People judge
by outward
appearance,
but the Lord looks
at the

1 SAMUEL
16:7

Contents

Introduction xi

START HERE	Kale, Kate, and the Great Longing	1
STEP #1	Believe What You See On Screen	17
STEP #2	Get “The Look” at All Costs	33
STEP #3	Compare Yourself to Every Other Girl	51
STEP #4	Believe Nasty Words (Yours and Others’)	67
STEP #5	Refuse to Take a Compliment	85
STEP #6	View Your Body as a Power Tool	97
STEP #7	Eat Junk and Diet, Diet, Diet	113
STEP #8	Adore or Ignore Exercise	131
STEP #9	Treat Your Scale like a Magic Mirror	149
STEP #10	Idolize Beauty	161

Notes 173

A Note from the Author 177

Introduction

I've read a lot of books—*lots* of them—and all my favorites have something in common: Each one made me feel as if I were talking with a friend, or at least someone who cared about my life. I guess when it comes down to it, I don't like having someone I've never met tell me how to live. Wild guess here—maybe you don't either? It's easier to listen to advice when we hear it from someone we know and who we know cares about us, right? (And, let's be honest, sometimes it's really encouraging to hear that an author is *human*, just like the rest of us!) So before we dig into this book together, it's only fair that we get to know each other a bit.

I'm Jessie. My given name is actually Jessica, and my last name is so hard to pronounce that I avoid using it when possible. (Just for kicks, it's pronounced min-à-see-in.) My single momma brought me into this world on a beautiful Californian March day just a *few* years ago (wink). She got married when I was five, and I grew up in a blended family of five kids. I played lots of sports in school and tried to figure out how to love God with my whole heart when it seemed to be *way* more interested in boys. (Maybe you can relate?) I liked school when I had friends, thought it was miserable when I didn't. I got good grades, ate too many Twix for

lunch, and never got used to spending ten to twelve hours a week on a school bus. (We kind of lived in the boondocks.)

After high school graduation, I went to a Christian college in Southern California. I played volleyball there and then got into rock climbing. I studied abroad two semesters, one in Israel and the other in Costa Rica. I still liked school when I had friends and learned not to be miserable when I didn't. I got fewer good grades, stopped eating Twix for lunch, and traded the school bus for my first car (a ridiculously small, gold Toyota MR2). There were ups, there were downs, and then there was *him*.

I married my match made in heaven the weekend after college graduation. For now, let me just say that Paul (or "Paco," as most people know him) swept me off my feet and I have never looked back. Best friends make the best soul mates, and he was—and is—both. (*Awww!*) I didn't think I had room for any more love in my heart until God gave us two daughters, Ryan and Logan. They're sweet li'l blessings wrapped in two feisty packages!

Besides loving on my family, my greatest joy these days is to help girls find their identity, pleasure, and purpose in God. I'm the resident big sis for a website called LifeLoveandGod.com, where I answer girls' questions about . . . well, life, love, and God. (I know, pretty creative, right?) Now that I have two daughters of my own, I'm all the more passionate about seeing girls understand their unique beauty, know how amazing God is, and hold their heads high in dignity.

That's where the LIFE, LOVE & GOD series comes in. These

books are meant to be the closest thing to just hanging out at my house, going for a hike together, or meeting for a small group in my living room. Each book covers different stuff you're facing, whether it's relationships with guys, shameful addictions, or getting along with your family.

You'll want to have a notebook or journal handy for the discussion questions at the end of each chapter. Trust me, you'll get so much more out of this book if you take time to think through those questions. Even better if you can grab a couple of friends (or your mom or a youth-group leader) and go through the book together! My heart is to see you grow in your relationship with God and shine with confidence, and that happens most often when you're in community with others.

You can find out more about my random favorite things on the "Meet Jessie" page at LifeLoveandGod.com. I'd love to hear a little about you, too, if you'd like to send me an e-mail through the website!

Now, without further ado, let's get busy giving you the tools you'll need to feel your ugliest! (Wink.)

Love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "jessie". The letters are connected and fluid, with a small dot above the 'i'.

START HERE

Kale, Kate, and the Great Longing

A few months ago, an ad for *Shape* magazine caught my eye.

Actually, since it's just us girls here, I might as well be honest: One particular picture of one particular person in one particular *Shape* magazine ad sent me on a mini body-image spiral. Let me explain.

I was on a mad Google hunt for a kale salad recipe. For real. But you know how those searches go: Whatever you start to look for usually gets sidetracked by lots of stuff you *weren't* looking for and didn't really need to know or see. Ever. (It's amazing how many rabbit holes run through that virtual wonderland we call the Internet.) So there I was, feeling pretty good about myself for searching for kale, period. But my determination was sidetracked before my third click.

The person who hijacked my search for a delicious cruciferous salad? Actress Kate Hudson, looking glowing and fabulous and oh-so-trim in her workout clothes. The article claimed that Miss Kate had a revolutionary workout that got her body rockin' like three minutes after

the total-body-stretch-and-plump, also known as getting pregnant—a process I’m quite familiar with and have willingly undergone. Twice. (You are welcome, my children.) At this point, maybe I should mention that I’ve always thought Kate Hudson was beautiful. Really beautiful. Not in an obsessive way or anything. More like a “I sure wouldn’t complain if I got mistaken for her twin” kind of way. So when this ad made it sound as though anyone could look just like that golden beauty—even after having kids—by following four simple exercises, I fell for it and clicked through.

So there I was, reading an article I had no intention of looking for, jealous of a woman I will never meet, and later, practicing Pilates moves on my dirty, sticky kitchen floor. I wish I could say my jealous tirade stopped there, but alas, it continued. The article mentioned that Kate had recently launched a new line of workout clothes, which she just happened to be wearing in the photo that had first caught my attention. So now I was on her workout clothes website, admiring Kate in spandex leggings, slouchy hoodies, and neon-colored sports bras. It sounds ridiculous to admit, but I couldn’t help but ponder the next dumb question: Would I look like *that* if I wore *those*? It was as if someone opened my head, took out my usually logical brain, and put it on ice while I oohed and aahed at the promised butt-lifting shorts and tummy-slimming tops. I spent way too long browsing the entire “Kate’s Picks” page and—as if wasting my time weren’t enough—proceeded to

waste my hard-earned cash by ordering a pair of black leggings and a camo-print tank top, complete with matching headband.

The clothes finally arrived, and when I tried them on, I didn't magically transform into Kate Hudson—big surprise. Don't get me wrong. They were cute, but my hair didn't spring into golden loveliness, and my booty certainly wasn't any tighter. I was still me: perfectly imperfect Jessie.

To be honest, before celebrating Kate Hudson Envy Day that fateful afternoon, I hadn't been spending a whole lot of time worrying about my looks. I guess you could say that as I've gotten older, I've become more comfortable in my skin (or maybe my skin has just gotten more comfortable as it stretches out). God has done amazing work in my heart and life over the past decade to help me see the beauty that was hiding in plain sight all along. So given my normally steady beat, I was shocked at how quickly I reverted to complete preoccupation with my looks based on one advertisement. My body-image relapse reminded me that every single girl out there—even of the Christian variety—feels the tension of a powerful longing at work in her heart.

The Great Longing

Can I tell you something about me? Something I don't usually start a conversation with?

I want to be pretty.

There, I said it. Does that make me a conceited starlet? An

insecure whiner? A Hollywood wannabe? No, it just makes me a woman. And if you're female, I can guarantee with 100 percent certainty that you want to feel pretty too. How do I know? Because God made us that way.

Let's go back to the beginning. Do you remember the story? God made the sky and the water, the land and the animals, and then on the sixth day He made Adam. He set Adam up in the gorgeous Garden of Eden—the perfect backdrop to start this whole humanity thing—and gave him the job of taking care of all the plants and animals. But even with that lush setting and all those animals, Adam was lonely, and it didn't take long to realize that no lion, tiger, or bear was going to fill his need for companionship. So God put him to sleep, took a rib, and let His divine creative juices flow once again. And the rest is history: Eve was the culmination of artistry, God's final act of creation on planet Earth. And He declared that creating girls was a very good thing (see Genesis 1:31). (Can I get an amen?)

God could have created another Adam, you know. They could have been best bros and had a great time chasing the animals, singing campfire songs under the stars, and having belching contests after dinner. But instead He created something new, something “other.” God created Eve very different from Adam. Sure there are those “anatomically correct” differences you learned about in sex ed class, but I'm talking about the more subtle differences that make men and women unique. Here are just a few to get you thinking:¹

KALE, KATE, AND THE GREAT LONGING

A Guy	A Girl
Has more angular features, from his shoulders to his jaw	Has softer features, from her hips to her skin texture
Has more muscle mass	Has more body fat (which helps shape those curvy lines!)
Has less contrast between the color of his eyes, lips, and surrounding skin	Has more contrast between the color of her eyes, lips, and surrounding skin (makeup boosts that contrast even more)
Is generally larger, from his height to his overall body mass	Is generally smaller, from her arms to her narrower fingers
Is well suited for physical labor	Is perfectly designed for going into labor (like of the baby variety)
Has less hair on his head and more on the rest of his body	Has more hair on her head and less on the rest of her body
Has a deeper voice	Has a higher tone to her voice
Has a visible Adam's apple	Has (what seem to be) larger eyes because of the bone shape below and above them
Has bushier eyebrows that follow a straight line	Has thinner, higher, and more curved eyebrows

Of course, these are generalities, so please don't do the normal girl thing and start comparing yourself to everything in the right-hand column! I've included them only to help

you consider some of those unique characteristics about your body that make you distinctly *woman*.

I'm sure you've heard the joke about how the first woman got her name. After God got done turning Adam's rib into a masterpiece, He brought her to Adam for the big reveal. Adam took one look at that hot li'l lady and exclaimed, "Whoa, man!" (Ba-dum-cha.)

Lame joke. But it holds a timeless truth: God made Eve to be Adam's beautiful counterpart. Did you catch that? From our softer skin and captivating curves to our sensitive and nurturing nature, part of our role as girls is simply to be beautiful! How cool is that?

The very fact that God didn't create another Adam says something. God created Eve's body and soul to captivate Adam, to delight him and enchant him.² God wanted Adam to find Eve *desirable*. (Kind of helps with that whole "be fruitful and multiply" command He gave in Genesis 1:28.) And here's the really important part we need to understand before we talk about beauty: God gave Eve a *desire to be desired*.

She *wanted* to be wanted by Adam.

A DADDY'S LOVE

Our desire to be loved starts way before our first crush; it starts with our dads. To find out how that relationship (or lack of one) plays into your self-image, decisions, and direction, check out the next LIFE, LOVE & GOD book on the topic of family (coming in 2017).

Fast-forward several thousand years, and you and I are no different. As Eve's daughters, our hearts are wired to want to be the object of a man's longing. We desire to be desirable, just like our Edenic momma. But here's where that desire gets twisted: In the twenty-first century, most of the voices we hear every day tell us that only a very particular *kind* of girl is physically beautiful. And if we don't feel that we match that image of beauty being shoved in our faces everywhere we look, it crushes a little piece of our identity. It's like a knife being shoved into our hearts and twisted. It makes us feel inferior, and we wonder if we'll ever be wanted. Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt that because you weren't tall enough or thin enough or curvy enough or smooth enough that *you* just weren't enough? Not just that you weren't as pretty as the next girl but that *you*—as a person, at the core of your being—weren't enough? Well, that's your woman-ness talking. And we need to get a handle on the truth of our beauty and our desirability if we're not going to get owned by our insecurities, especially if we're going to start believing what God says about us.

So first things first. To get to the truth of our beauty, we need to answer this age-old question: Does outward beauty matter?

*“It's What's on the Inside That Counts”
(And Other Truths We Pretend to Believe)*

We've all heard it at one time or another. For me it comes like clockwork when I'm looking in the mirror on one of

my worst hair days, or when I get a monster zit dead center on my forehead or on the tip of my nose. (Why they always show up in the worst possible places, I do not know. But I digress . . .) From out of the depths of my gray matter, I hear her: my alter ego with a voice reminiscent of a ninety-three-year-old woman looking for her lost poodle. “Now, Jessie,” she croons, “just remember: It’s what’s inside that counts!” If my eyes rolled any farther back, I’m sure I’d see her in the back of my head, knitting booties in a rocking chair, no doubt. And I want to fire back, “Oh yeah? No one’s going to *care* what’s inside when they get knocked over by this thing protruding from my face, now are they?”

But is it true? Is internal beauty really all that matters?

As we’ll see in a minute, God’s Word is crystal clear: Internal beauty is priority numero uno. It’s definitely *most* important. That said, in real life, statements such as “It’s what’s on the inside that counts” and “God’s opinion matters most” fall flat on hearts programmed to be desirable. And I’d rather wrestle through some hard truths together than give you pat answers. When you feel ugly, hearing “God loves you just the way you are” feels like bailing water from a sinking cruise liner with a thimble.

I think some of us Christians have focused so much on the superiority of internal beauty that we’ve stifled that God-given longing we have as girls to be beautiful outside, too. Maybe God had Bible writers like Solomon, Peter, and Paul remind girls about the importance of internal beauty

because we already had the external part down! It comes naturally to us to care about looking good. I don't think any of us would argue that if left to ourselves, we girls do tend to care too much about looking good on the outside. So God wrote verses like these to remind us not to go overboard on our looks:

The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them.
People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD
looks at the heart.

I SAMUEL 16:7

A beautiful woman who lacks discretion
is like a gold ring in a pig's snout.

PROVERBS 11:22

Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last;
but a woman who fears the LORD will be
greatly praised.

PROVERBS 31:30

Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God.

I PETER 3:3-4

These verses should be scrawled across our bathroom mirrors and posted on our closet doors. We need to memorize them, meditate on them, and let them flow out of our lives! But I also see room for balance. These verses don't tell us we have to choose between *all* internal or *all* external. That's great news for those of us who enjoy mascara, mud masks, and a perfect pair of shoes. We can enjoy being girls and still love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds (which Jesus said is the greatest commandment; see Matthew 22:37-38). Call me crazy, but I think it's possible to be outwardly beautiful while still having discretion, fearing the Lord, and cultivating a "gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3:4).

We can't ignore the desire God has given us to be desirable any more than we can wish away our uterus. It's just part of being a woman, my friend. So it should come as good news to us that beauty isn't bad. Looking cute isn't evil. Can it become an idol? Absolutely. And we're going to discover how to guard against that in the chapters to come. But there's another reason why we need to treat the pursuit of beauty carefully: Arriving at "beautiful" is next to impossible. In fact, it seems the harder we try to reach our idea of perfect beauty, the less likely we are to see ourselves as beautiful. Interestingly enough, even girls who seem to match society's ideal are not immune to feeling undesirable.

The Harder We Try, the Less We Succeed

Just about every girl on the planet struggles with self-worth and body-image issues, even the prettiest, most popular specimens of our species. One friend in particular stands out as a perfect example of this bizarre phenomenon. The first time I saw Cassidy³ was during a work meeting, and I was—how do I put it? I think completely intimidated about sums it up. At five foot eight, her slender (but not-too-skinny) frame and tan complexion caught my attention. She had long brown hair, sparkling eyes, and the cutest freckles you ever saw. Cassidy was *beautiful*.

I finally got over my fear that Cassidy would somehow eat me alive and sat next to her one day. Turns out she was the picture of sweetness—a down-to-earth girl with a love for God and a passion for His Word. In time we got to be good friends, so when I started doing research for a Bible study I was writing about body image for women,⁴ I asked if I could interview her. Here are a few of her answers:

Q: True or False: I believe I am beautiful inside and out.

A: False

Q: On a scale of 1 to 10, how happy are you with the way you look?

A: 6

Q: True or False: If it had been up to me, I would have made me just the way I am.

A: False

Q: What would you need to change in order to feel completely content with your body?

A: I want longer legs, a smaller nose, straighter teeth, bigger eyes, skin not so ruddy, a body not so flabby, fewer freckles and moles, no spider veins, a chin that doesn't just drop right off into my neck (I have no jawline), olive skin, arms not so hairy, a butt that doesn't jiggle so much, and bigger boobs. I would also like to maintain a slightly thinner frame, and I cannot decide which would be better: a breast enlargement or a nose job.

When I read Cassidy's answers, my jaw just about hit the floor. *Really?* She couldn't possibly be talking about the same person I saw. How could someone so beautiful feel so *not* beautiful?

Cassidy had everything going for her too. Not only was she beautiful, she also had a great job, really nice (supercute) fiancé, and killer personality. Yet this beautiful daughter of the King admitted to struggling with self-loathing. At first glance, it seemed that of all people, Cassidy should be feeling pretty confident about herself. I mean, she checked nearly every box on society's "beauty scorecard." So the fact that even *she* was ready to sign up for a nip, tuck, and plump showed me that none of us is immune. In fact, her honesty hit on an important truth. It doesn't make sense, but here it is:

The more we focus on becoming physically beautiful, the uglier we feel.

Remember, wanting to look beautiful—to be desirable—isn't bad, but we have to be careful. And realistic. The more

we focus on becoming beautiful, the further away perfection will feel. If we think we'll be most wanted if we attain a one-size-fits-all image of perfection, we're going to be chasing that proverbial carrot our entire lives. *Always* chasing. Trust me, I know. It's a law of life that I'm quite familiar with, and I have the Kate-Hudson-look-alike clothes to prove it (as well as the emotional scars that came from trying to be something I'm not for much of my life).

Yep, I have a whole lot of experience trying to measure up to a fleeting beauty ideal. I've tanned and starved and bought and primed in search of feeling beautiful, and none of it did anything to make me feel more so. In fact, based on my experience, it just made matters worse. But here's the good news: Because of all that useless chasing, I now have a whole slew of tips to help you feel pretty awful about yourself. Yep, you read that right. I have ten simple steps to help you feel your worst. These are tried-and-true methods, authenticated by me and the experiences of all womankind. I'm excited to introduce them to you, though I have a feeling you might already be acquainted.

God, thank You for making me a girl. I guess
 I should thank You for making girls, period!
 You didn't have to, and I see now that my
 female genes are a true creative masterpiece.
 I acknowledge that You made me the way I am
on purpose. Teach me to see that as a good
 thing. Teach me how to recognize and enjoy
 the beauty You've woven into my DNA, even on

4. *If I asked you the same questions I asked Cassidy, how would you answer?*

Q: *True or False: I believe I am beautiful inside and out.*

A:

Q: *On a scale of 1 to 10, how happy are you with the way you look?*

A:

Q: *True or False: If it had been up to me, I would have made me just the way I am.*

A:

Q: *What would you need to change in order to feel completely content with your body?*

A:

5. *What do you think keeps you from recognizing your true beauty? Jot down some thoughts on this in your journal.*

6. *Do you agree that “the more we focus on becoming physically beautiful, the uglier we feel”? Why or why not?*

STEP #1

Believe What You See On Screen

DIRECTIONS: Believe that the images you see every day in the media are 100 percent authentic. Assume those girls were born naturally uber-skinny and wake up every day with perfect hair, skin, and teeth. Then believe it's humanly possible for *you* to look like *that* in real life. Whatever you do, don't look into the pre- and post-production processes, where designers sell products by creating fake people.

Little known fact: I started my college career as a film production major. I even worked as an extra in Hollywood to make some cash. Although my experiences on set completely ruined the illusion of Hollywood glamour for me (think looong days and creepy coworkers), I did get to wear some pretty awesome costumes as a 70s hippie, sock-hop sweetie, blushing bride, and computer geek. I even got to throw pillows in a music video for a former Spice Girl. I'm pretty sure that will come back to haunt me someday.

If *you've* ever wanted to dabble in the movie industry, here's your chance. I want you to pretend you're the casting director for the next blockbuster, a film about a beautiful

twentysomething girl who wins the heart of an unsuspecting-but-handsome hero. (Obviously, the plot isn't a big stretch. I think Hollywood has made three dozen such films this week alone.) Okay. So go ahead and pick out your hottie hero from today's lineup of your favorite actors. I'll wait.

LEADING MALE ROLE

Name :

Now for the starlet. You get to do what every casting director wishes they could do: create her from scratch. I want you to picture what you think she should look like and then fill out her "one sheet" below.

LEADING FEMALE ROLE

Name: "The Perfect Girl"

Height :

Dress size :

Bust-waist-hip measurements :

Eye color :

Skin color and texture :

Facial features (nose,
lips, and cheekbones) :

Hair color and length :

I have a sneaking suspicion that your completely made-up leading lady is strangely (like freakily) similar to that of every other girl who reads this book, from her perfectly tanned, smooth skin to her cute button nose.

Sound fishy to you?

It shouldn't surprise us though. I'm going to venture to say the media plays a major role in creating the picture of perfection burned into our brains. (Yes, that could possibly be the biggest understatement in this entire book.) I just flipped through *Seventeen* magazine¹ and found 342 pictures of girls that fit part or all of the stats you probably wrote down on your one sheet: long legs; blue or green eyes; smooth, shiny hair; perfectly straight, white teeth; tan, smooth, shiny skin; and a size zero to four. That's a lot of pictures. But to give you even more perspective, the entire magazine is only 162 pages long! For just \$2.99, I can buy a manual for how to look, think, and act to be considered beautiful by the world at large. A small price to pay for the girl intent on looking her best, eh?

Ad It Up

Pretty soon the endangered species list might include "blank spaces." Some sources say the average person sees up to five thousand ads a day.² Is that humanly possible? That's like twelve ads a second the entire seventeen hours you're awake! Companies have to come up with creative ways to get their products to stand out in a sea of stuff, so there are ads on

subway turnstiles, on the sides of buildings, and in doctors' examination rooms. The CBS network even stamped ads for their TV shows on eggs—of the chicken variety—sold at grocery stores. Like I want to see “CBS Mondays: Leave the Yolks to Us” while making my spinach and mushroom omelet? Clever, but *no*. You might even see ads on the motion-sickness bags in the seat-back pocket on your next flight.³ Can you imagine the logic? When I'm nauseated and about to hurl, am I really going to think, *What do we have here? A Subway ad, huh? I'll be sure to buy a sandwich when I land, right after I puke my guts out into the bag stamped with their subtle marketing campaign.*

Yeah, ads are everywhere. With so much competition, how's a chap supposed to make a buck? Advertisers know the only way to get people's attention is to be everywhere they look. Well that, or they can use the “secret weapon.”

What is this secret weapon? you might ask. It's an advertising tool so powerful it can make both men and women take a second look at an ad selling everything from perfume to pet food. The secret weapon in advertising is—are you ready for it?—*a beautiful woman*. A picture of a woman draws people toward an ad like moths to a streetlight. Like shoppers to a semi-annual event. Like a PMS-ing gal to a pint of luscious, raspberry chocolate-chip gelato (not that I'd know anything about that). Advertisers know the draw of beauty. So they plaster images of gorgeousness on their ads to make men desire and women admire. They don't care whether the images are “realistic” or harm your body image. They're just

looking to sell their product. And make money. And take lavish vacations in the Riviera.

I don't know what percentage of ads sport a beautiful woman, but I do know that in almost every single one of them, the woman pictured fits a very narrow description of beauty. Our casting experiment is proof. I also know that this narrow description of beauty has been created by our culture (we're going to explore that more in the next chapter). By "culture," I mean media, because in today's world, the media has a big role in forming our culture.

But is this image of "beauty" in your mind—the impression left by millions of ads and movies you've seen over your lifetime—for real? Does it even exist in the real world? That's what I set out to learn (play Sherlock Holmes theme music).

Myth Busters

*"I have never yet seen, and you probably never will see, a fashion or beauty picture that hasn't been retouched."*⁴

DEREK HUDSON, professional photographer

It all started in the 1930s, when photographers used lighting and soft focus to glamorize movie stars in print. A lot of makeup and some sultry dresses were all they needed to turn pretty women into beauty icons. That was then. This is now: In the twenty-first century, photographers use computer programs to completely alter everything about a woman. They create *fake people*.

I remember hearing as a teen that the photos I saw in ads and on magazine covers had been touched up. The news gave me some comfort when I looked in the mirror on prom night—decked out in a beautiful dress, perfect makeup, and professionally styled hair—and *still* didn't look like the picture I saw in *Teen Vogue*. But I had no idea just how much touching up “touching up” meant until I saw a video that transformed a normal girl into a Photoshopped beauty right before my eyes. I thought “touched up” meant they erased some pimples and gave a touch of tan. Oh no. In just over a minute of time-lapse video, stylists applied makeup, straightened and curled her hair, and then used photo-editing software to make her lips plumper, eyes bigger, eyebrows thinner and more arched, neck longer, forehead taller, face slimmer, and hair longer. The final “product” was then plastered to a billboard to underscore the fact that what we see in ads is nothing more than a computer-generated work of art.⁵

The process of taking a photographer's digital photo and making it print worthy is called post-work. Using photo-editing software, post-work designers can:

- Improve the light, color, and contrast of the picture.
- Magically transform the model's skin into blemish-free, silken, android-looking perfection. (Look, Mom—no pores!)
- Reshape her curves, waist, and bust. We're talking about adding or shaving *inches* from the model's hips, stomach, legs, and ta-tas.

- Make her grow taller or lengthen only certain features, such as her neck or legs.
- Make the color of her eyes more intense or just change the color altogether.
- Restyle, recolor, and texturize her hair.
- Change the background of the photo so it looks as though the model is somewhere else entirely.

Who needs beauty products when you have Photoshop? It's a one-stop shop for eyeliner, eye shadow, mascara, eye-brow filler, eye whitener, colored contacts, lipstick, concealer, foundation, skin contourer, pore minimizer, hair dye, plastic surgery, liposuction, and DNA manipulation.

Most of the women we envy in the photos we see aren't real. And if they're not real, then hoping to look like them is an exercise in stupidity! It's like looking at Monet's famous painting *Water Lilies* and then trying to become a lily pad. We can't become art.

I, like you, am glad girls are starting to see the truth: that most women in the media aren't all they're advertised to be. Most girls—85 percent, last I checked—at least know that the images they see have been altered.⁶ That's a good place to start. I'm trying to do my part to get the news to the other 15 percent!

Here's the crazy thing: You'd think that if we knew we were looking at fake images, we wouldn't compare ourselves to them. That would make sense, right? But as you and I both know, girls can be completely irrational when it comes

to beauty, and sound reason doesn't always make a dent in our envy! Knowing an image is "altered" doesn't erase the negative impact it can have on our view of our bodies. In the same study I mentioned, more than 30 percent of girls who knew better still said they were "unconfident to extremely unconfident about their body," even though one in three girls said they didn't think it was possible for them to have the body they aspired to have.⁷

These studies aren't news to us, though, are they? In our experience as girls, they make perfect sense. We know about Photoshop; some of us even use it ourselves. Yet we still struggle with body image (maybe more than at any other time in history). That's dangerous. *Really* dangerous. Let's talk about why.

Danger in Our Myth

The phony images advertisers try to pass off as fact aren't as harmless as they'd like us to believe. Obviously. But have you ever wondered who's *really* behind all this deception? Is it the advertisers? The models? The products? Who's to blame?

I'll give you a *little* big hint:

[The Devil] was a murderer from the beginning.
He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.

JOHN 8:44

When I think about the lies that Satan feeds us girls, my blood starts to boil. When I picture him filling the world with lies that prey on girls like you . . . argh! I'm starting to get all fired up just thinking about it! Because this is what he does, sis: He ever so subtly tells us that because we don't look like an image that doesn't even stinking *exist* in real life, we're not beautiful. We're not worth much. We don't deserve to hold our heads high with dignity. Satan's words are a direct contradiction to what God says about us, so when we choose to believe Satan's lies, he essentially gets us to tell God, "Why did You make me this way? What were You *thinking*?"

I'm not saying everyone who works in media or advertising is evil. Goodness, my own husband is a graphic artist! But I *am* saying that there is a very real spiritual battle going on, and Satan is using mankind's desire to get rich (through advertising) as a weapon against us. Ephesians 6:12-13 talks about the battle we fight:

We are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.

We're facing a serious enemy. Satan is not out for prison-ers; he's out to kill us spiritually. And he knows that if he can

get us to doubt what God has said, we're doomed. That's what happened in the Garden of Eden, you know. The dialogue went something like this (you can find the real convo in Genesis 3:1-5):

Satan: Did God really tell you not to eat from any tree in the garden? Hmmm?

Eve: Well, no, not exactly. We can eat from most of the trees here. God told us to stay away from only the tree in the middle of the garden. That one is definitely off-limits. God said not to even touch it or we'll die.

Satan: *Die?* Come on, you don't really believe that, do you? God told you not to eat it because He knows that the moment you do, you'll see what's really going on. You'll be just like God, knowing everything, from good all the way to evil.

Did you notice how Satan twisted God's words? Well, it worked. Eve was swept away by the Devil's smooth-talkin' mumbo jumbo, and she disobeyed God. You know the rest of the story. We're all still under the curse of sin because of what went down in the Garden that day. And Satan is still manipulating truth to get us to turn our backs on God. In the realm of beauty, that crafty son of a snake is a master at twisting the truth that God's daughters are beautiful—inside *and* out—until we're confused with his lies and begin to doubt God. A modern-day garden dialogue might go something like this:

Satan: God didn't *really* say that you're beautiful just the way you are, did He? Come on—look at how this girl's body is perfectly proportioned, her blemish-free skin polished golden, her face the portrait of beauty. You don't really think you're as beautiful as *she* is, do you?

Eve: Well, no, I guess not. I certainly don't look like her, do I? Maybe God was just trying to make me feel better when He said that I'm beautiful.

Satan: That's right! He just didn't want you to feel jealous of other girls, so He told you all sorts of nice things to make you feel better about yourself. But if you *do* want to be beautiful—*really* beautiful—well, I can show you how. All you have to do is . . .

And so we run ourselves into the ground trying to look like the phony picture of beauty we see all around us. And in the end, what do we have to show for it? Nada. Unless you count a mangled, depressed heart and an empty wallet.

But why would Satan spend so much of his energy on this battle? What does he hope to gain by getting us to doubt our beauty and worth?

As girls, we want to be desirable, remember? If we don't feel that we measure up, we're much more likely to try to fill that hole in our hearts with anything *other* than God: an unhealthy relationship with a guy, acceptance from the wrong crowd, rebellion, or even success. But there's even more to the danger.

When we look in the mirror, if we're quick to point out all the things we would have done differently if *we* had been in charge of the DNA design process, it's like a slap in our Creator's face. We already touched on the fact that criticizing our bodies is equivalent to accusing God of making a mistake (or, for some of us, a *lot* of mistakes). You can probably see how that could create some tension in your relationship with God. Isaiah 45:9 warns us,

What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator.
 Does a clay pot argue with its maker?
 Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it,
 saying,
 "Stop, you're doing it wrong!"

When Satan convinces us that God messed up when He was putting together our bodies, "sorrow awaits"—sorrow, like of the complete *misery* variety.

John 8:44 tells us that Satan can't stand the truth because there isn't a shred of truth in him. He hates the fact that you are uniquely and exquisitely beautiful, because he hates God and everything good that God creates. He'll do everything he can to pull you down. So when Satan comes around with his familiar accusations, tell him you're the *real* deal.

The Real Deal

Have you ever wondered why we call the girls on magazine covers models? I have. (But then, you'll find I tend to

question everything.) I mean, think about the actual definition for a moment:

model (¹mă-dəl), n.: an organism whose appearance a mimic imitates.⁸

A model is something that has reached perfection, something we want to be just like. We have model students, model citizens, and role models. But in the world of beauty and fashion, we have *supermodels* for that. Go figure.

Looking at Webster's definition, a model is something a mimic imitates. A mimic is someone who can't come up with anything original on her own. An imitator. A copycat. A poser. Those don't sound like favorable attributes to me, yet that's what we (myself included) become when we idolize beauty icons. Of course, when I take a step back and think about it logically, I'd rather be known as a girl with confidence, dignity, and unique beauty than Gisele's mini-me. (Most days, anyway. Just keeping it real.) The hard part is thinking about it logically when those fake images of perfection are shoved in my face at every turn. So what's a girl to do?

If you want to feel ugly, by all means, believe everything you see. But if you want to understand the *real* beauty you possess, it's time to quit idolizing cookie-cutter images and start imitating Someone else:

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do,
because you are his dear children. Live a life filled

with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

EPHESIANS 5:1-2

Imitate God. How? By living a life of love, just like our ultimate model, Jesus. I don't think our Savior was too preoccupied about His looks (see Isaiah 53:2; Matthew 6:28-29). He was too busy loving others to care if His muscles looked like the cover of *GQ* magazine. I don't want to spoil some good stuff to come, so for now, let me just say that when we spend our lives loving others instead of preoccupied with our looks, some really amazing things happen! And as the icing on the cake, when we follow Jesus Christ's example, we too can be a "pleasing aroma" to God—a fragrance better than any Chanel perfume.

So the next time you're tempted to throw a pity party because you don't have long-enough legs or a thin-enough waist or smooth-enough skin, take a step back and remember truth. If God wanted us all to look like cloned Barbie dolls, He could easily have gone that route. He can do that sort of thing—He's God! But the fact that He created so many versions of beautiful shows off His flair for the unique. For diversity.

Think about the variety of women God has made to fill this bright, big world! Since creating Eve, God has designed billions of women of every size and shape imaginable. Women with gorgeous dark skin and shiny black hair. Women with

round butts and big ta-tas. Women with freckles and wrinkles and bulges and curves. Women with wide faces and narrow hips. Women with curly hair and dimples and moles and, yes, cellulite. He created us all with the same intent: to be beautiful. Different, and beautiful.

Oh yeah, and *real*.

God, You are a creative genius! You made beauty out of a bone, for crying out loud!⁹ Forgive me for doubting that You've made me beautiful too. It's just so hard, God, to remember and appreciate the beauty You've designed in me when I see so many images of exaggerated beauty all over the place. Help me remember the truth daily. I want to imitate You, God—not the fashion industry—as I follow Jesus' example of genuine love. Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. *What is an advertiser's "secret weapon"? Why does it get both men and women to look longer at an ad?*

2. *If you have a magazine handy, take a few minutes to browse through some pictures in ads while you play undercover Photoshop detective. What evidence do you see that the picture has been touched up? (Hints: look for hair or pores on the models' skin, unnatural hair color or texture, extra long or thin bodies, and so on.)*

3. *Do advertisers' visual tricks work? Do they make you want the products they're selling? What effects do their visual tricks have on your view of your body?*

4. *Why does Satan want you to doubt your beauty and worth? What would he accomplish if he got you to do that?*

5. *Think about one woman (of any age) you find beautiful but who doesn't necessarily look just like a supermodel. What makes her beautiful?*

6. *How could you encourage your friends to see their unique beauty too?*

7. *Take another look at Ephesians 5:1-2. What are three ways you can "imitate God" in the way you view beauty? Write your ideas in your journal.*