

# 1 *☞* THE LIE WE BUY

## *Beauty and Culture*

THE THREE WISHES OF EVERY MAN:  
TO BE HEALTHY, TO BE RICH BY  
HONEST MEANS, AND TO BE BEAUTIFUL.

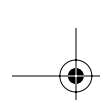
*☞ Plato*



*N*ostalgia. Walks down memory lane fill me with warm fuzzies—right up there with a warm bubble bath and a good cup of café mocha. When I think about my childhood, I have an index of “remember when” images that rank high on the list. The treehouse my dad built, learning to bake pumpkin seeds, *Highlights* magazine, pajamas with footies, candy necklaces and my Easy Bake Oven. But there is no memory that stands out more than my obsession with Barbie.

My sister and I owned an enormous collection of Barbie paraphernalia. In addition to our Barbie dolls, we had the Barbie truck, the Barbie Corvette, the Barbie motor home and the Barbie mansion, complete with Barbie furniture right down to the Barbie coffee table and the Barbie silverware in the kitchen. Our Barbies had an abundant wardrobe of the latest fashions, and most of Barbie’s time was spent changing in and out of her very cool clothes. Of course we also





had Ken and a knockoff version called the Sunshine Family, but they all took a backseat to the star of the show.

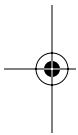
There was one problem. My Barbie had come with curly hair. Very early on I put her hair in a ponytail with a rubber band, and I left it that way too long in Barbie years. When I finally took the rubber band out, the plastic hair had become so tangled that it stuck straight up on the top of her head—even Don King would have been embarrassed. There she was, doomed to a life of bad hair days.

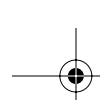
My sister, on the other hand, owned Malibu Barbie. Her selling point had been a perfect tan and long beautiful hair. I was so jealous. I secretly coveted her golden locks on behalf of my Barbie. Some days I even suggested that we switch Barbies, but my sister never showed any interest. I think she was on to me.

#### A BARBIE WORLDVIEW

Thinking about it now, I can almost taste the irony. A Barbie with flaws. Isn't Barbie supposed to be the ideal role model for little girls? At least that's what her website claims. Barbie is supposed to inspire. She's been a cheerleader, a college student, a power executive, an astronaut, even an athlete in the WNBA. There is nothing she doesn't own—cars, houses, clothes, boats, swimming pools, even her own McDonald's franchise. She has never known failure. She has never been without a boyfriend. She has never needed plastic surgery. Or has she?

Barbie was born in 1959, when Mattel cofounder Ruth Handler approached her all-male design staff with the idea of a three-dimensional doll to replace the paper-doll fad. The result was a fashion doll that became a cultural icon of the ideal beautiful woman—tall, slender, curvy and white. But if Barbie were a real human being, she would need some major reconstructive surgery just to survive. It's been estimated that if Barbie had an average bust size of 36 inches, her proportions would make her anywhere from 6 feet 2 inches to 7 feet 5 inches tall. No wonder she was able to play for the WNBA. In





order to achieve her hourglass figure, she would need to have two ribs removed along with several major organs. Barbie has no hormonal cycle to affect her complexion and no metabolism to struggle with. And if you ask me, that gap between her thighs could only be the result of a major bone deformity in her hips. What began as a fantasy of perfect beauty actually turned out to be a freak.

This is the image that has been marketed to young girls all over the world as an inspiration to womanhood. And we eat it up. Barbie has become a \$1.5 billion-a-year industry. “Barbie touches so many aspects of a girl’s psyche, from adventure to independence to dreams of aspirations, that the emotional connections with the Barbie brand run deep.”

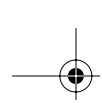
Don’t worry, I’m not on a Barbie-burning crusade. And I’m certainly no expert on the psychological effects of Barbie on young children. But I do know that at a very young age I bought into the idea that unless my Barbie was physically perfect, she wasn’t as good as the other Barbies on the block. In fact, she embarrassed me.

As I grew into adulthood, I left my Barbie behind. Unfortunately I continued my Barbie philosophy of life. My body grew into the form that my Maker designed it to be. But I’ve struggled with the belief that unless I am physically “perfect”—a perfection that is unattainable and unrealistic—I’m somehow not as valuable as everybody else. Barbie moved out, but Victoria moved in.

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There’s nothing quite like a glance at a Victoria’s Secret catalog to invoke a flood of insecurities and feelings of disappointment. I know I’m supposed to be admiring the undergarments on those pages, and I can appreciate a well-made brassiere. But frankly, it isn’t a well-

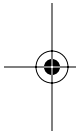




made product that draws my attention. It's Victoria's models. Immediately a body comparison game ensues. Am I supposed to look like that? Those legs? That tummy? That skin? eyes? lips? My hair won't do that. And I know that bra wouldn't look that way on me.

It seems I'm not alone in my twisted worldview. A recent survey found that 70 percent of women felt depressed, guilty and shameful after looking at a fashion magazine for only three minutes. Even women who look as if they came from a lingerie ad are susceptible to questioning their worth in relationship to their appearance. Few of us are unaffected by the desire for a "body by Victoria."

*How have I been affected by the desire  
for a "body by Victoria"?*



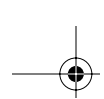
#### **ROLE MODELS AND COVER MODELS**

It takes only a quick stroll past a magazine rack or a flip of the remote control to notice that our culture makes a clear statement. The ideal woman is beautiful. I mean drop-dead gorgeous. And if I want to reach "ideal" status, then my role models are those whom our culture has enthroned as the beautiful ones.

Here is where the lie begins. We confuse role models with cover models. We have taken on a cultural physics equation that says our value is directly proportional to our physical attractiveness. The result? We are people consumed with our outward appearance. And it shows.

There is nothing quite as revealing of our values as the ledger of our checkbooks. Each year, billions of dollars are spent in the quest to come just a bit closer to our culture's ideal beauty: \$20 billion on cosmetics, \$2 billion on hair products, \$74 billion on diet foods. (Explain that to the hungry children of Sudan.) The beauty industry knows about our spending habits and therefore invests heavily in ad-





vertising campaigns. Magazine advertising revenue for cosmetics, beauty aids and hair products has reached over \$1.5 billion a year. In addition, 7.4 million Americans spend a small fortune on cosmetic surgery annually. Five out of six of them are women.

We've been buying a lie. Literally. It's this: Being attractive means being happy. It means being admired, respected, loved. It means I have great value. Guys will want me. Girls will want to be me. Employers will hire me. Peers will befriend me.

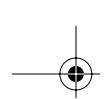
Unfortunately, the lie is reinforced in everyday life: the culture's "beautiful ones" sometimes do get better treatment. Who hasn't noticed the way some guys gawk at a pretty girl? In high school the benefits of popularity—the prom queen or class president title, party invitations, dates—were lavished upon the pretty ones. TV shows like Donald Trump's *The Apprentice* gave us an inside glimpse at how women could use their good looks to close a business deal. I once saw an ad in *Ebony* magazine for hair relaxer that capitalized on the fact that a woman's appearance plays a significant role in landing a job: "Was it her résumé . . . or Raveen?" The relationship between people's looks and the way they are treated has even been a topic of psychological research. In one study, a "beautiful" woman and an "ugly" woman each approach an occupied phone booth where a dime was planted. When asked about the dime, 87 percent of booth occupants return it to the "beautiful" woman, but only 64 percent give it to the "ugly" one.

☞ We have begun to confuse role models with cover models.

No wonder we're willing to pay whatever the cost for beauty. *Glamour* magazine did a survey asking, "What would you give up if you could slim down permanently?" Would you believe that 5 percent of respondents were actually willing to give up five years of their life?

From where we're standing, the grass certainly appears greener under the feet of a supermodel. But does physical beauty really deliver all that it promises us? Have we even stopped to notice?





The lie has us running full speed ahead, only to discover it's merely a mirage. For the images of beauty that we are chasing are not real women at all. Yes, that's right. The woman you saw last week on the cover of *Vogue*—the one with the voluptuous cleavage, the killer thighs, the flawless face, hair blowing in the wind over the caption in bold letters “JUST 5 DAYS TO THE PERFECT BODY”—she doesn't really exist.

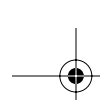
I wonder if this is Victoria's big secret. The media industry uses a variety of deceptive techniques to create artificial beauty. We can't see the duct tape holding a model's chest in a gravity-defying position or the hemorrhoid cream used to fix her puffy, unrested eyes. Professionals are paid big bucks to spend hours on the model's makeup, hairstyling and wardrobe, using products and assistants that most of us will never have access to. My bathroom doesn't have professional lighting to highlight my best features and hide others. Even if it did, I can't hide out there forever. And let's be honest. If we saw a woman in line at the grocery store in a flattering pose like those we see on magazine covers, we'd think she was nuts.

As if those techniques weren't enough to “enhance” the model's beauty, the media industry then takes the photos and alters them electronically. They'll take a little off her tummy, airbrush out that cellulite and touch up her not-quite perfect complexion. The result is a completely fictitious image. Actress Julianne Moore agrees: “There is so much illusion in photographs and movies. I know an actress friend who was looking at a photo in a magazine and said, ‘Why don't I look like that?’—and then she realized it was a picture of herself.”

Most of us can't possibly come close to these images. Genetically our bodies just can't do it, and in many cases it wouldn't even be healthy. In the past three decades, most Miss America winners have had a body mass index that lies within the range of malnutrition. Ac-

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tress Melanie Griffith has spent over fifty thousand dollars on plastic surgery on her tummy, thighs and hips. *Baywatch* legend Pamela Anderson admits to having had multiple liposuctions to reach emaciated proportions as well as enlarging her breasts. Many celebrities who are considered a bit heavy are actually underweight for their height and age. The average North American woman is 5 feet 3 inches tall and weighs 152 pounds. The average model is 5 feet 9 inches tall and weighs just 110 pounds. We've been comparing our bodies to fictitious, unhealthy or surgically altered ones.

*How have I bought into the lies of the beauty culture?*

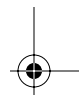
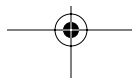


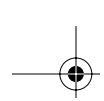
#### THE LIE EXPOSED

Believe it or not, the unthinkable has happened. Like a tiny hole torn out of the blindfold of humanity, a particle of reality made its way into the mass media. I was just an unsuspecting passerby when I stumbled upon the scandalous exposé.

The air was crisp on a sunny autumn day when I casually strolled into the brand-new Barnes & Noble that had just opened in town. As I was savoring the delicious aromas of new books and cappuccino, I started on my favorite route, beginning at the display tables just inside the door and making my way past the magazine racks. Let's see, *Rolling Stone*? Not today. *Cat Fancy*? Not ever. And then I saw it.

*More* magazine had done an interview and photo shoot with movie star Jamie Lee Curtis. Normally I would have breezed right past this article, but something was radically different about this spread. On one page Jamie Lee was posed in typical celebrity style that screamed, "Don't you want to be me?" Her skin was flawless. Her body was stunning in a sexy black dress and high heels. Three assistants surrounded her, touching up her trendy hairstyle and glamorous makeup. But right next to it was another photo of Jamie Lee. She had





allowed photographers to shoot her in a sports bra and spandex briefs—no hairstyle, no makeup, no computer touchups, no special lighting and no apologies, tummy rolls and all.

Jamie Lee Curtis, the actress made famous by the movie *Perfect*, was revealing to the world that she isn't. The article quoted her saying, "There's a reality to the way I look without my clothes on. I don't have great thighs. I have very big breasts and a soft, fatty little tummy. And I've got back fat. People assume that I'm walking around in little spaghetti-strap dresses. It's insidious—Glam Jamie, the Perfect Jamie, the great figure, blah, blah, blah. . . . It's such a fraud. And I'm the one perpetuating it."

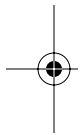
I scanned the faces of the cover models staring at me from that magazine rack. It was a sea of flawless perfection. Virtually every issue—

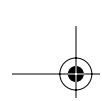
*People, Glamour, Ebony, Latina, TV Guide*—was adorned with an image of the perfect hair, the perfect lips or the perfect cleavage. The photo of Jamie Lee Curtis was a refreshing glimpse of reality—well, close anyway. Even Jamie Lee has admitted to having plastic surgery. But amid all the smoke and mirrors, it was as though little Toto had pulled back the curtain of the Great Oz of Beauty, and the image was exposed as a fraud.

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JAMIE LEE CURTIS, ACTRESS

Almost immediately people were buzzing about Jamie Lee's daring photo shoot. Television giants like Oprah and Jay Leno interviewed her. Mail poured in to *More* magazine from readers who claimed their lives had been changed by the piece. After polling its readers, the magazine reported that 90 percent were elated that Jamie Lee had bared her true self. But when asked, "Would you have the courage to reveal your-





self to public scrutiny?” 72 percent said, “Are you kidding? No chance.”

And the very next issue of the magazine included “secrets of the stars” for achieving sleek hair and flawless skin. The curtain fell back into place, and we were back to smoke and mirrors.

### FROM PARTNERS TO PINUPS

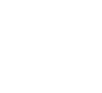
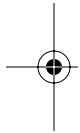
It hasn't always been this way. So how did we become so entangled in the lie? Although most historical eras have brought some particular definition of beauty standards, the mess we find ourselves in is actually a relatively recent phenomenon.

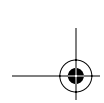
In her book *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf cites the Industrial Revolution as a key turning point in the way women's worth was measured.

Before the development of technologies of mass production—daguerreotypes, photographs, etc.—an ordinary woman was exposed to few such images [of beauty] outside the Church. Since the family was a productive unit and women's work complemented men's, the value of women who were not aristocrats or prostitutes lay in their work skills, economic shrewdness, physical strength, and fertility. Physical attraction obviously played its part; but “beauty” as we understand it was not, for ordinary women, a serious issue in the marriage marketplace.

Industrialization took the husband's work away from home, and the emerging factories and businesses gave rise to the concepts of “breadwinner” and mere “domestic” work. As the middle class grew, the standard of living rose, families became smaller, and women found themselves comparatively idle. In addition, the invention of mass printing birthed a new era of visual images of perceived beauty. Wolf explains,

Most of our assumptions about the way women have always thought about “beauty” date from no earlier than the 1830's,





when the cult of domesticity was first consolidated and the beauty index invented. For the first time new technologies could reproduce . . . images of how women should look. In the 1840's the first nude photographs of prostitutes were taken; advertisements using images of "beautiful" women first appeared in mid-century. Copies of classical artworks, postcards of society beauties and royal mistresses, Currier and Ives prints, and porcelain figurines flooded the separate sphere to which middle-class women were confined.

The ideal beauty queen was now in print. And she was in mass circulation. It's no wonder that women quickly began the comparison game. Once well-matched work partners with men, women were now measured not by their giftedness but by how closely they could emulate the women imaged in the media. And in a nation that prides itself on capitalism, it's no surprise that industry and advertising profited from the comparison game. Making money off women's new obsession would prove to be quite lucrative. And so the web was woven.



### WHO'S THE BAD GUY?

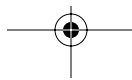
Every story has a villain. It would be very easy to label the big bad media as the culprit. After all, aren't they the ones making a buck off our drive to be attractive? Aren't they the ones perpetuating the lie? Well, it isn't quite so simple.

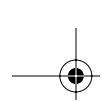
A college friend of mine, Kristy,\* and I bonded over everything from torturous psychology exams to late-night pizza orders. We shared secrets. We shared clothing. We also shared a common disdain for our figures. We would throw around lighthearted comments like, "Move over, sister. Make room on that couch for my Shamu-sized booty!"

I noticed, though, that Kristy's joking would escalate after she returned from breaks at home. Then I met her mother. Though Kristy's mom was quite friendly, no conversation with her lasted long before

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\*Her name, like the names of others mentioned in this book, has been changed.





the subject of body size inevitably came up. Who had lost weight. Who had gained weight. Calorie counting. Fat grams. What so-and-so should or should not have been wearing. And it wasn't long before her mom was comfortable with addressing me directly about it: "Have you lost weight, Michelle?" Of course I hadn't. Not with our steady diet of Lucky Charms, pepperoni pizza and the chocolate-chip cookies in my care package from home. I suppose it was her way of encouraging me to look my best. But instead it made me feel rotten about my body.

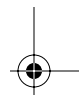
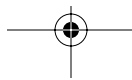
If you checked eight to twelve of these statements, clearly it's time for the Lord to begin to replace the cultural lies with his truth about your body. Too many of us have fully bought the lie that our value is directly proportional to our physical attractiveness. We need to pray that the Lord would use this book to bring us freedom.

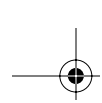
If you checked four to seven of these statements, you too have been affected by the cultural lies about our bodies. You are not a full-force beauty addict, but the danger still lurks that the lies could take root in your soul and take over your life and relationships. Pray that God would weed out those lies as you read and respond.

If you checked three or fewer of these statements, you're doing relatively well in a world that bombards us with false messages about our bodies. Pray not only that God would use this book to encourage you in your journey but also that you could be an agent of truth to those around you who are struggling to love their bodies.

### HOW DOES IT START?

Though a sea of media-promoted artificial beauty surrounds us, it is actually those closest to us who do the most damage. We pass on our body obsessions to each other like a nasty strain of influenza. New research shows that feelings about body image start very early, long before the media play a significant role in girls' lives. A survey at Kenyon College discovered that elementary-school girls who were more concerned about body shape and weight were more likely to





have mothers who made weight-related comments. The study quoted Ira Sacker (coauthor of *Dying to Be Thin*): “Some of my patients, who are just out of nursery school, tell me that they’re fat. Turns out that their moms are saying the same thing about themselves.”

One woman, Deborah, can’t remember anyone telling her to be ashamed of her body. Not in so many words. It’s easy to assume she’s just been the victim of a Hollywood conspiracy. But look closer.

Deb comes from an interethnic family. Her Caucasian father had always struggled with his weight. They lived near Lake Michigan, and his embarrassment would always surface during summer months when the family would spend lots of time in swimsuits while boating and enjoying the beach. Her dad’s feelings about his own body would occasionally spill over in comments about Deborah’s. Deb remembers her father encouraging her to watch her weight when she was just twelve years old. Her muscular physique reflected her athletic lifestyle. But most other girls her age were stick-straight.

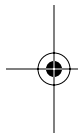
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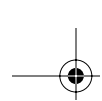
She concluded that her bulging thighs must be fat. She spent adolescence feeling ugly and overweight.

Deborah’s mother is Jewish. Deb remembers her mother’s remarks about how unfortunate it was that she had passed on her “Jewish nose.”

The family considered plastic surgery for Jewish girls almost a rite of passage into womanhood. Deb’s mom did it, her older sisters did it, aunts, cousins, friends, everyone. Her family even talked about giving Deb plastic surgery as a gift for her sixteenth birthday. Naturally Deborah assumed that her nose would be a hindrance to success and acceptance.

Had the big bad media caused Deborah to dislike her body? Certainly we can’t rule out our culture’s influence on definitions of beauty and value, especially a culture so saturated with twisted perceptions about beauty and ethnicity—so saturated that as recently as





1996 a plastic surgery manual described procedures for altering ethnic noses, with specific directions for correcting a “Jewish nose.”

But the influence of Deb’s friends and family was even more contagious than the media. Unfortunately our loved ones are often oblivious to the wounds they inflict. In fact they sometimes think that their comments are an act of love. At age seventeen, Alice Chung wrote about her despair in struggling with an eating disorder:

My mother tells me that I’ve been diagnosed with depression. My father tells me this is okay. That maybe God in all his holiness let this happen so that I could help others. . . . He tells me to pray. Pray, Alice. Pray. Ask him to help you and make you better. Pray. And then he points to my waist and tells me it’s too thick. He says that I should lose some weight. I don’t need him to tell me.



*In what ways have my family and friends affected  
how I feel about my appearance?*

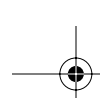


**HOW ABOUT YOU?**

How have you been affected by the lie that your body must fit a certain standard in order to be accepted? Check all of the following statements that apply to you:

- I am critical of my body.
- When I look in the mirror, I first notice the parts of my body that I think are inadequate.
- When I see images of “beautiful women” in the media, I compare myself to them.
- As I get dressed and ready in the morning, I consider what others will think of my appearance.





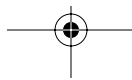
- I weigh myself frequently and am emotionally affected by the results.
- The thought of being seen without makeup or hair done is scary to me.
- When others compliment my appearance, I have a hard time believing it's true.
- When I eat in front of other people, I wonder what they are thinking about me.
- I tend to wear clothes that are baggy to hide my figure or tight clothes to show off my body in hopes of receiving attention.
- If money were no object, I would have plastic surgery in a heartbeat.
- I have often thought that becoming more beautiful would be the solution to some of life's challenges—my desires for romantic relationships, career success, popularity among friends or self-esteem.
- In the past month I have spent a significant amount of money on beauty supplies.

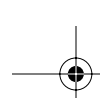


#### A NEW FAMILY INFLUENCE

It seems as though we're doomed. Bombarded by media. Infected by those we love. Isn't it hopeless? Am I sentenced to a life of wishing I were something that I'm not? A life of always falling short, always feeling inadequate?

What if the insecure words of an overweight father were replaced by loving words of truth from our heavenly Father? What if a family encouraging us to obsess about our appearance were silenced by the family of God's encouragements to love what God made and take care of it well? What if friendships full of jokes about our bodies were transformed by the Creator who calls us his friend? What if the defi-





inition of beauty authored by the Gap was edited by the definition of beauty created by the Author of Life?

David knew the answer. He was able to shout at the top of his lungs, “You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because *I am fearfully and wonderfully made*; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Psalm 139:14). Sure, he never had to shop for jeans or compete with Halle Berry. But what if we were able to shout with him, with complete sincerity, each morning while getting dressed and ready for the day? Some might say these are childish dreams of a reality that will never exist—a dream world not far beyond candy necklaces and Barbie. But what if?

☞ What if the insecure words of an overweight father were replaced by loving words of truth from our heavenly Father?

*What would it take to fully agree with David that “I am fearfully and wonderfully made”?*

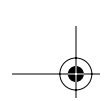


**TOOLS FOR THE JOURNEY**

As I have journeyed with Jesus, he has been faithful to walk me through a process of changing how I feel about my body. Though his work in me is not over, there are three incredible tools God has used to reconstruct my body image, and I’ve included all three in this book.

The first has been ongoing conversation with God. I used to think that “meeting with God” meant reading a bit of my Bible and sending up a grocery-list prayer for needs that he should know about already. But my time with God has been transformed into an intimate time of conversation. I learned how to let God speak to me through Scripture. I learned how to hear his voice in prayer. I learned to converse with him by journaling.





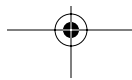
My journals were not for recording the day's events to look back on later. They were to help me process my life and slow me down to hear God. I would allow God to ask me questions about my life that I would answer in my journal. As I journaled, I would pause periodically to process what I had just written, giving God time to respond to my soul.

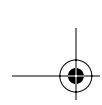
In each chapter of this book you'll find reflection questions sprinkled throughout. I encourage you to use them to begin a journal in which you set out to converse with God about healthy body image. Write down your thoughts, and give God time to talk to you about those things.

The second tool I discovered was Scripture memory. I used to think that memorizing Bible verses was a tedious exercise reserved for kids in Sunday school. But that changed in my sophomore year of college. At the time I was really struggling with a lustful thought life. One day my InterVarsity staff worker said something that I will never forget: "When you are struggling with sin, the best weapon is to memorize a truth in the Bible that speaks to that particular issue. Then when you are tempted, recite the Bible verse. Soon you will find victory, because the last thing that Satan wants to do is to tempt you with something that will trigger Scripture!" I noticed, too, that this was Jesus' response to temptation. When Satan tempted him in the desert, how did he respond? With Scripture.

So I set out to memorize Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." Then every time I found my mind wandering to lustful thoughts, I would recite this verse, sometimes even out loud. And you know, it wasn't long before I found freedom. I really was thinking about "such things."

Likewise, certain verses have been quite influential in transforming my body image. That's why at the end of each chapter I suggest a Scripture to memorize. I pray that as you memorize these words God would brand the truth on your heart.

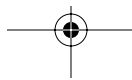


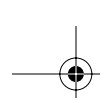


The third tool is community. God never intended for us to live alone, nor should we think that we can become more like Jesus on our own. God's Word tells us, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'" (12:21). The quest for a healthy body image requires us to swim against the current of mainstream culture. It has been invaluable to have others diving in alongside me.

At the end of each chapter I include some questions for discussion. While the personal reflection questions are designed for you to use alone with God, the discussion questions are meant to help you process the material with other people. It is my hope that you will find others to read and discuss the material with you and that you'll find strength and encouragement as you discover that you are not striving alone. Maybe you will be surprised to find someone shares your struggles. Maybe you will experience healing as you let yourself be vulnerable and open up to others some things you've kept private. Maybe it will be an opportunity to build crosscultural friendships that both bless you and change our world. Maybe you will tap into the unique power of interceding in prayer for each other. Or maybe someone in a different place will offer you wisdom, hope or practical suggestions. Don't be one who says, "I don't need you!"

Our world already bulges with books, magazine articles and television interviews about establishing a healthy body image. But in these pages you will not find nutritional hype about carbohydrates, fashion tips for dressing your body type or ten easy steps to a prettier you. I believe that the core of the issue is spiritual. And God has plenty to say to us about it. The place to begin is to wrestle with some key biblical truths about how God made us and how much he delights in us. I have found very little hope for a truly healthy body image outside of knowing Jesus intimately. Sure, there are therapists and an endless supply of self-help books. But these can be mere Band-Aids on the real problems deep within us. The problems are actually the result of hu-





man rebellion, our turning away from a loving God and his loving plans for us. The Bible calls this sin, and we all have rebellious hearts. It is only through Jesus that our rebellion finds remedy.

You likely won't agree with everything I say. That's OK. But I believe that God wants to speak to us. I believe that God grieves for the joy and freedom we are missing when we attempt to live by values dictated by the culture. I believe we have bought a lie, but the Lord of grace, the One whose job it is to make old things new and dead things alive, desires to change the parts of us we think are hopelessly unchangeable. That is why I love him so much. May you encounter God's great love for you on these pages and fall deeper in love with him too.

#### SCRIPTURE TO MEMORIZE

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

PSALM 139:13-14

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you think the culture has defined beauty?
2. What images of beauty have most affected you?
3. In what ways have you bought into the lie that being attractive will make you happy, likable or successful? How does that affect your life on a daily basis?
4. What would it take for you to have the same vulnerable confidence that Jamie Lee Curtis displayed?
5. In what ways have you seen messages about body image passed down through your family?
6. What would be different in your life if you experienced the freedom of living out Psalm 139?

