

featured articles

Developing true beauty

By April Barr

Waiting in the longest grocery store check-out line I had ever encountered, I began scanning magazine covers. I saw the latest celebrities and models with their thin, tan, stylishly-clothed bodies, their flawless hair and make-up. One article offered the latest tips on curbing cravings – information that might help me shave off a few unwanted pounds, those annoying areas I forget when consuming handfuls of my favorite chocolates! Soon, though, I realized I was playing a deadly game. It's a game many of us women have played – the game of comparing ourselves to magazine images. We desire the same figure and look, while overlooking the fact that each perfect cover was created by a team of experts: photographers with lighting, make-up artists, clothing stylists, and – the ultimate secret weapon – airbrushing! Unfortunately, few of us have the luxury of having professionals focused on making us look glamorous every minute of the day!

Culture's definition of beauty

Our culture defines beauty by properties that are attractive to the eye. In many ways, our society is obsessed with external appearance. Americans spend numerous dollars, time, and attention toward achieving the world's "ideal" beauty standard. Remember the reality TV show *The Swan*? The 16 female contestants were willing to endure up to 20 procedures to be physically transformed into artificial beauties.

More than 10.2 million cosmetic plastic surgery procedures were performed in the United States in 2005, up 11 percent from 2004, according to statistics released by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS). "For many, cosmetic plastic surgery is the new take on 'growing old gracefully,'" said ASPS President Bruce Cunningham.

How far are you willing to go to attain outward beauty? I asked myself this question as I recently pondered having microdermabrasion for an area of problematic skin. What happens when our bodies show signs of damage or disease because of the choices we make? What do we do when aging causes fine lines and other natural signs of life's progression? We've all noticed celebrities who have been so lifted, pulled, and tightened that they don't even look like themselves

anymore. The disheartening realization is that our world's beauty standard is based on opinions that ebb and flow like the changing tides in the ocean. However, the good news is that God's beauty standards are unchanging and internal.

What is true beauty?

The Bible says that God is more interested in the heart, or character, of a person than the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7). This complete definition of beauty includes internal qualities that please the ear, intellect, and moral sense.

Often the external does not reflect who you are on the inside. Have you ever noticed an attractive woman whose beauty instantly faded when she opened her mouth? Maybe she had a rude or offensive attitude. Or maybe the words she spoke were critical, negative, judgmental, or profane. No matter how beautiful she looked on the outside, her behavior was unattractive!

In a store recently, I saw a woman who had the perfect package: sleek hair, fresh make-up, designer clothing, a trendy handbag, and exquisite shoes. The woman wanted to return an item. When the clerk informed her that the return policy did not allow a refund, she became loudly irate. I felt embarrassed for this woman and could not believe she had treated the clerk so poorly for adhering to store policy. Her beauty was instantly marred.

Then God gently reminded me that if I looked into the mirror of my heart at certain times, I would not like what I would see. I can be like the woman I observed at the store: well-groomed on the outside, ugly on the inside. We all have bad beauty days physically; however, each day we can choose to yield to God, allowing him to develop true beauty inside our hearts!

Growing in true beauty

A few weeks ago, I took an hour-long phone survey to help a company evaluate a new sandwich. In return, I was given a certificate to for a free lunch. When I presented the certificate, the manager would not accept my voucher because the corporate headquarters had not been refunding his franchise for this offer. I kindly explained what I had been promised. When he still would not honor the company's word, I decided to purchase a sandwich. The man behind me, who had watched the exchange, insisted on buying my lunch and said, "I am impressed with your reaction and can tell you are representing something higher than yourself."

What a tremendous compliment! The beauty of my character radiated in this stranger's eyes as he saw the love of Christ shine through me. I was thankful for God's patience and grace in this perpetual process of growing beauty within.

As I am continuously challenged, I encourage you also to allow God to consistently grow your inner beauty, the kind God esteems. Even though physical beauty naturally fades, we can choose whether our character blossoms or shrivels. In the next several months in this column, we will examine how seven facial features provide practical reminders of how to develop true beauty within. Please join me on this journey of discovering the lasting beauty each of us can cultivate.

About April Barr



Modeling and acting internationally and throughout the United States, April Barr has appeared in magazines like *Glamour*, *Vogue*, *Seventeen*, and *Modern Bride*. Recently, April has graced the three covers of *Becoming*, a magazine format of the Bible.

Throughout her experiences in the fashion industry, April has realized that true beauty is found only in a growing, vibrant, personal relationship with Jesus. April is the founder of Queen Esther's Court, her platform for encouraging and equipping women of all ages. As April inspires and challenges audiences throughout the country, she provides practical tips and insights from God's Word for developing internal character that creates true, lasting outer beauty. If you are interested in April speaking at your next event, please visit www.aprilbarr.com or call (888) 471-9927.