

Identity and Body Image Issues



Carpenters “yesterday once more” / “close to you” / “We’ve only just begun” / I won’t last a day without you / “Rainy Days & Mondays”/ “Top Of The World” / “For All We Know” During a period in the 1970s when louder and wilder [rock](#) was in great demand, Richard and Karen produced a distinctively soft musical style that made them among the [best-selling music artists](#) of all time.^[2]

[For Karen Carpenter, the incident she remembers sending her into the freefall of eating disorders and eventually killing her in '83, ten years after “Yesterday Once More,” began w/a picture where she notices she was getting a bit of a tummy, and did not want to disappoint herself, her fans, and her family, by “becoming too fat” . . . Body image issues contributed to the death of Karen Carpenter @ age 32, and many others after her...]

No doubt, there’s probably not a woman (or man, truth be known) alive who wouldn’t change *something* about their bodies. [On a personal level, I would like to have a head full of hair, a different shaped face (beach ball sitting on shoulders!), a different nose, and about 3 more inches of height, just 3 – along w/a frame carrying 25 less pounds!]

What IS it about your body – men AND women – that you don’t prefer? And what happens in your mind and to your emotional state when someone points out a physical imperfection you have – either behind your back or right in front of your face? [even in nurseries, I’ve heard people talk, “Why look @ that!!!!” Or we see a mole, a wart, bad teeth, or a twitch, and focus on that . . . FLAW!]

Actually, we don’t need other’s help when it comes to our physical flaws. After all, we’ve discovered and examined, catalogued and complained about, observed and obsessed over *every* blemish, wrinkle, fat deposit, and flaw we have. For too many people – including Christians – body image is a life-dominating issue, the source of the extremes of excessive pride and arrogance and unhappiness and self-loathing. Jerry Bridges writes, “Many people struggle to accept themselves as they are. For them, life is just a continuous adversity, not from outside circumstances, but from who they are.” (from Bridges’ *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts*, p 104)ⁱ Praise God, Scripture targets our body issues and adversities – big and small – with Truth that liberates. Take these reminders from the Bible to heart, please. Make them personal.

1st, Remember: My body is HAND-CRAFTED to precise specifications.

(Cf Job 10:8, 10:11; Psalm 119:73, 139:14)

[Quilt made for Carol & Me by the Alta Woods Church Family. It's a tangible reminder of the time and attentive care people put into projects that are important to them.] And it is with ATTENTIVE CARE that God fashioned us, molded us, and quilted us together in our Mother's womb. (cf Scriptures) What an AMAZING thought! Each of us, individually, is the HANDI-work of the Almighty, All-Wise, infinitely CREATIVE & Sovereign God of the universe. In great detail, EVERY PART of our bodies was knit together by the hand of God. EVERY part. We are in our basic physical makeup EXACTLY how God wanted us to be!

HOW do we respond to this?

→ **DELIGHT in God's design! (Psalm 95:6)** When we complain about our physical imperfections, our complaint isn't with the mirror or ourselves; our complaint is essentially against God. [Bridges quote, p. 51, *True Beauty*]

For me, that means when I complain about my hands being too stubby to play the guitar like I'd like to, or sigh in disgust when it takes me only 20 seconds to blow-dry my hair that is already falling out of my scalp @ an alarming rate each day, I am arguing with God. I am telling the Master Craftsman that He made a few mistakes!

We must NOT think lightly of our dissatisfaction with our physical appearance. We need to delight in God's design, even if the design is not what the latest "expert body designers" think our design should be! [cf George McDonald quote, *True beauty*, p. 52].

Or let me ask you this: How can we worship our MAKER and diss on what our MAKER has MADE, at the same time? We WORSHIP God and praise and thank GOD for what He has made! Don't demean God by demeaning His Creation!

→ **We are ANSWERABLE to GOD for our body decisions.** We do NOT have luxury of giving our HEARTS to God, but keeping our BODIES to ourselves! We need to ask ourselves, "What does God's Word say about what we should and should NOT do to our bodies? There's NO LIST in the Bible of allowable cosmetic procedures and those what are not. Nor does the Bible reveal a MDR of time for exercising. Nor does the Bible reveal the Ideal BMI. God doesn't give us #s and charts.

So what is/are the standards? What we see in movies? On television? On the front of PEOPLE Mag? Is THAT the standard we aspire to? Do we tell our children to look to all that as role models for how our bodies should look? And while we may NEVER tell some they have to be THIN in order to be beautiful (or look "hunky" as a man), is that where we're going? Is a perfectly thin (which is a relative word, by the way), toned body the Biblical standard? If so, WHERE in the Bible do we find that Standard?

Here's the BIBLICAL God for our eating and exercising: **1 Corinthians 10:31**, the *GLORY OF GOD*. *We do what we do so people will focus on GOD, not us / make a big deal about GOD, not us [Max Lucado, It's NOT about me]*

1 Timothy 4:8 tells us that bodily exercise has value. We are not to abuse our bodies, neglect our bodies, or overindulge our bodily appetites to the point where people would look @ us and say "their GOD is their bellies – whether that belly looks like we're 9 months pregnant when we're not or whether that belly is a 6-pack, or a 9-pack.

Philippians 3:19, "*Their god is their belly, and their glory is their shame...*"

You've GOT to ask yourselves this important question: What are my MOTIVES for eating (or not) & exercise (or not)? Are we preoccupied with OURSELVES or with GOD'S glory? [Catherine & the athlete, pp 54-55 *True Beauty*]

WATCH YOUR EMOTIONAL STATE and what that says about our SPIRITUAL state! Are we chasing SELF-glory??

2nd, Remember: My body is NOT something to OBSESS over.

- ➔ God calls us to STEWARD our bodies in SERVICE to GOD. Romans 12:1 We maintain healthy eating habits so that we may SERVE the LORD better & w/more efficiency! We want our bodies to function at peak performance so we may serve God!

- ➔ So a KEY QUESTION for us to ask is: **HOW CAN I STEWARD MY BODY FOR SERVICE TO CHRIST AND NOT FOR SELF-GLORY?** If you are all about how your body looks, you're drawing attention to yourself. If you don't care how your body looks, you're neglect is drawing attention to yourself. Either way, the focus is on you! God's MERCIES in Christ free us from slavery to our own self-focus and sinful desires for attention and approval! [Courtney's story, pp 57-58 *True Beauty*]

- ➔ **Before you engage in a diet, consider your MOTIVES for testing out dangerous eating behaviors.** (*James 1:14-15; Matthew 6:13*). We're all tempted to make eating a CONTROL issue. Both ways. Both OBESE & ANOREXIC people are HAVE A CONTROL ISSUE, because weight IS something we CAN control.

- ➔ **In the Bible, the goal for our bodies just might be something called "HUMBLE ENHANCEMENT"**ⁱⁱⁱ Whatever in our lives that distracts from the Glory of God and

the advancement of the Gospel should be avoided! [“Would you like to hear about JEEEEEEESUS! Uh, no. Not right now . . .] Whatever draws attention to YOU is going to take attention FROM God & the GOSPEL!

3 CONSIDERATIONS WHEN THINKING ABOUT IDENTITY AND BODY IMAGE

1. **Consider this: Your CORE IDENTITY is NOT about your body!** There’s an ABSENCE of physical appearance standards set for someone identifying you as a CHRISTIAN, other than MODESTY and DEFLECTING GLORY away from yourself & TO God.
2. **Consider your HEART.** That is your MOTIVES for looking like you look. That’s important.

Should women (and men) adorn their bodies? Yes,

Why? Because the GOD in whose IMAGE you are created has given us a taste for beauty, a desire for beauty, and a desire to make this world beautiful.

What is the measure of success? NOT approval or ATTENTION from others (that’s SELF-glory) but bringing glory to God! **Would I be content and happy even if NOBODY said ANYTHING to be about the way I look?**

3. **Consider the SAFETY of what you’re doing!** (*Exodus 20:13*) In ANY effort to look better, are you HARMING your body?? With ANY surgery, procedure, diet, or exercise plan, am I risking my health and safety? If so, it’s not worth it to kill yourself over time! One way or the other, through overeating or not eating enough or the right kinds of foods, we can dig ourselves a grave using a fork & spoon!
4. **Consider OTHERS.** The choices we make are PERSONAL, but choices NEVER taken in isolation. We need to discuss, and most of all, LISTEN to the godly counsel of others.

One Simple Question from 1 Corinthians 10:31 . . . Will this decision bring GLORY to GOD (not me) and USEFUL in SERVICE to GOD (and not myself)?

God DOES care about your body. He sent His Son to take on human flesh for your sake, to free you from SELF-GLORY and SELF-ABSORPTION to WORSHIP & SERVE God with all God has given you, including your body!

ⁱ Many of the stories and ideas presented in this lesson are thanks to the book *True Beauty* by Carolyn Mahaney & Nicole Whitacre, Crossway Publishers, 2014.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.