

never enough

Confronting Lies about Appearance and
Achievement with Gospel Hope

Sarah Ivill



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Never Enough

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*To the One who answered me out of my distress,
Who brought my life up from the pit.
Salvation is of the Lord!*

*And to my sisters who find their
lives fainting away
As they pay regard to vain idols,
May you know His salvation! (Jonah 2:1, 6–9)*

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Foreword

The day I learned my daughter had an eating disorder, we were in the car together for the first time since she had gotten her driver's license the month before. I had missed this time with her; traditionally it had always been where our best conversations took place. That day was no different. Yet it was totally different from what I ever expected.

Before I even backed out of the driveway, she blurted out the secret she had been carrying and was no longer able to bear the weight of alone: "Mom, I've been making myself throw up."

Most of what followed is a blur to me now. I remember wanting to pull the car over so I could hold her tight and fighting back tears as I listened to my precious girl share about the worthlessness she felt. How was it even possible for her to think she was *never enough*?

Of course, as her mom I'm partial. But when I tell you *gorgeous, popular, talented, funny, compassionate, and well liked* were the words often used to describe her, I am not exaggerating. She was the type of girl others might look at and think she had it all together. Perfect, even.

But for my daughter nothing could be further from the truth. Unknown to me, she was constantly evaluating how she thought she stacked up to others. Whether she was walking the halls at school or scrolling through social media, these comparisons were endless. In her mind everyone was skinnier, prettier, smarter, wealthier, more talented, or a better athlete. And it all translated into her feeling as if she were not enough, that she was less-than and worthless.

I know my daughter is far from alone in such struggles with identity and worth. I also know the striving to attain and maintain a certain standard isn't limited to those in their teens. In this book Sarah Ivill highlights her own story as well as the stories of women even in the Bible who, as she explains, "battled the temptation to covet and compare." So if you have picked up this book feeling all alone, be assured you are not.

The "comparison cage," as Sarah appropriately calls it, stems all the way back to the garden when Adam and Eve bought into the serpent's lies that life was found somewhere other than in God. And just like they saw and took the fruit thinking it would give them something more, we too "exchange the truth of God for the lie, and [worship] and [serve] the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25).

We look to our own wisdom, to our appearance, performance, relationships, and success to fill our longing for love, acceptance, significance, and worth. But the harder we try to secure an identity in things that can't fill us, the emptier and more desperate we become. For my daughter, this is what led to her eating disorder.

But my daughter and Sarah's greatest problem (as Sarah will share with you) was not with food. Their greatest problem—as with all of us—is a heart problem. Or as Sarah puts it, “a worship disorder,” not an eating disorder.

And that's just it. It is why Sarah has written this book: to expose the false identities we turn to as we look for identity and worth—in other words, the lies we believe about ourselves and how they spiral us down. But Sarah doesn't stop with the diagnosis; she leads us to the source of true help and healing in Christ Jesus, whose love, acceptance, *and* identity we have secured. Knowing who He is for us is the truth we need to replace the lies.

We get tripped up, though, because remembering who we are in Christ is not a one-and-done thing. It is a battle. This is not what we who want a quick fix like to hear. Certainly as a mother I wanted nothing more than to quickly and permanently wipe away my daughter's struggles. But in this, God revealed my own false god of control, leading me to see my struggle with not accepting circumstances that were outside of my command. Ultimately, just as my daughter was not resting in Christ's work and worth for her, neither was I. I was trying to be my own savior—and hers. But if Christ's acceptance of us is based on His perfect record (and it is), then we are free from having to be perfect, or even having to be okay! And so the message of this book is what I needed to hear again too.

I hope that as you read *Never Enough* what you discover, or rediscover, is that because Jesus was enough and His record is yours, you are enough. May this bring to you

great freedom and rest and, by His grace, the perseverance to fix your eyes on Christ in a world that values what is fading away.

—Kristen Hatton, author of *The Gospel-Centered Life in Exodus*, *Face Time: Your Identity in a Selfie World*, and *Get Your Story Straight*

A Note from Sarah

This book is a result of the response I received from sharing my testimony in fall 2017 with a women's Bible study that was composed mostly of young professionals, as well as from subsequent emails over the next few months asking me for prayer or help regarding a loved one battling an eating disorder. After one of my pastor's wives encouraged me that my testimony was something that needed to be heard in middle schools, high schools, and college campuses, as well as women's Bible studies, my heart was set with the theme for my next book. By God's grace the Lord moved the project forward by opening the door with my publisher, for which I am exceedingly grateful.

At the same time, I was becoming increasingly aware through articles, pediatricians, pastors, and friends that social media, particularly Instagram, was extremely harmful for young women. In fact, it was becoming a life-or-death matter for some young women who turned to eating disorders because they weren't getting enough likes or comments on their social media posts. If eating disorders were rampant during my high school days—and they were—how

much more are they today among girls receiving a steady stream of images on social media with which to compare or compete? Recent research confirms these claims. In one study regarding body image and performance, teens were asked why they felt inferior (or less-than): 59 percent said because of appearance (body image), 49 percent because of ability (performance), 38 percent because of intelligence (performance), and 35 percent because of size (body image).¹

In another study teens were asked why they were so anxious about what was happening online and why they were so fascinated with social media. Their responses included the following: 61 percent were checking to see if their posts were getting likes and comments; 36 percent were checking to see if their peers were doing things without them; and 21 percent said they were checking to make sure nothing unkind was being said about them.² It is not just teens who are tempted to compare or compete with what they see on social media or in the lives of those around them. Women of all ages continue to battle body image and performance lies. In preparing the manuscript for this book, I asked female readers as young as their early teens and as old as their seventies to provide feedback. All of them found applicable material for their lives in these pages.

1. Kristen Hatton, "Behind the Screens of the Selfie World of Teens," *By Faith: The Online Magazine of the Presbyterian Church in America*, January 31, 2018, <http://byfaithonline.com/behind-the-screens-of-the-selfie-world-of-teens/>.

2. Hatton, "Behind the Screens of the Selfie World of Teens."

Throughout the chapters of this book, you will see how closely body image and performance were related in my own battle with lies that ultimately led to my addiction to thinness and fitness during my teenage years and early twenties. Perhaps that is why I want to write to the younger generation. My heart is tender toward them. I can relate to their battle, and I want to humbly help. But I don't just want to help the younger generation; I also want to help their mothers and grandmothers understand the lies behind the relentless pursuit of a pretty appearance and perfect achievements.

In one sense this book was one of the easiest for me to write. It is my story. But in another sense the fact that it is my story also made it one of the hardest. I am not proud of the lies my flesh has been so prone to believe. And I'm not proud of the actions I've taken because of it. But God's Word says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4). And so I have tried to be transparent in these pages, offering you the comfort that I received from our heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His Spirit, who helps us in our weakness and enables us to say no to the flesh and yes to the things of God. Although I am no longer addicted to thinness and fitness, I don't want to leave you with the impression that I've triumphed over the five lies I will be discussing in this book. Each day I

am tempted to believe at least one, if not several, of them. I have to diligently pray that the Lord will strengthen me against them. And when I fall, I always find the forgiving arms of my heavenly Father opened wide to me.

In the introduction I give you the testimony I recounted to the women's Bible study group composed mostly of young professionals. I don't return to my addiction to thinness and fitness until chapter 6. In between I expose five lies that laid the foundation for my addiction, which began in high school, lasted through college, and ended in seminary. In chapter 1 I address the lie that our ways are better than God's ways and our wisdom is better than His wisdom. Chapter 2 considers the lie that we have to look like "her" (whether it's a supermodel, one of our peers, or one of our sisters in Christ) in order to be beautiful. In chapter 3 I deal with the lie that our beauty and significance are defined by whether or not a man loves us. I explore the lie that our significance is based on our success as defined by our superiors in chapter 4. And in chapter 5 I conclude with the lie that if we had what "she" has then we would be more satisfied, significant, and successful than we are now.

In chapter 6, after sharing how these lies led to the perfect storm in my own life and recounting my battle with an addiction to thinness and fitness, I conclude the book with the grand hope that the truth of God's Word sets us free from "the sin which so easily ensnares us" so that we can "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising

the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1–2). It is to this throne that we are invited to run when the idols of this world seemingly overtake us: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15–16).

It is my sincere desire that you will read this book and answer the questions at the close of each chapter within the context of the local church. This was vital for me in my own battle with these lies. Lies are much easier to believe in isolation than they are in community. It would be wonderful for an older group of women to study this with a younger group of women, or for mothers and daughters to read this book together, or for a women’s Bible study composed of women from various stages of life to study these chapters together. As you do so, I hope and pray you are convicted in your sin, comforted in your shame, challenged in your beliefs, and changed by the truth of God’s Word.

My prayer is that “the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, [will] make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:20–21).

Acknowledgments

There are several people I need to thank for being part of this project. Melissa McPhail's invitation to share my testimony in front of a women's Bible study group, although I didn't know it at the time, was the launching point of this book. She went on to be a reader of the initial manuscript, giving encouraging feedback. Pat Lawrence, one of our pastor's wives in attendance when I shared my testimony, encouraged me to take this message to girls as young as middle school. She and her husband, Bernie Lawrence (senior associate pastor at Christ Covenant Church), read an early version of the manuscript, giving several practical suggestions. Andrea Johnson, Joni Clayton, and Kara and Gabrielle Girrard all read early versions of the book, providing insightful and encouraging feedback. I also want to thank the women's Bible study team at my church, which rallied around me in prayer support.

Thank you to my mom and dad, David and Judy Gelaude, who were my very first readers and who, in many ways, lived this story with me. Their love for me, patience with me, and support of me over the years has

blessed me tremendously. My husband, Charles, also read the manuscript in detail, providing invaluable support and encouragement. My oldest children, Caleb and Hannah, provided constant encouragement and prayers. They, along with my younger children, Daniel and Lydia, are a constant reminder of my task to pass on the faith to the next generation. I want them to know their hope is not in their appearance or their achievements, but in the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is this gospel that the pastors of our church, Christ Covenant Church (PCA), faithfully proclaim Sunday after Sunday, for which I am deeply grateful.

Thank you to Reformation Heritage Books: Dr. Joel Beeke, for your personal encouragement to keep writing and your commitment to read each manuscript; and especially Jay Collier, for his support and valuable feedback; and Annette Gysen for once again having a keen editorial eye and encouraging tone.

Finally, thank you to my heavenly Father, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and to the Spirit, who helps me in my weakness. To the triune God be the glory for what He has done through me, a broken vessel and a flawed instrument, yet one that is in the grip of His mighty and gracious hand.

Introduction

It was my sophomore year of high school, and I was sitting around with my cross-country team listening to the older girls compare fat grams in bagel brands. If you have ever looked at bagel labels, you know that there is not any difference worth noting unless you are obsessed with your weight. Little did I know how influential that conversation, and many more like it, would become in my life. Add to that the billboards, magazines, and other media that boasted model-thin women all around me, and I bought into the lie “I have to look like ‘her’ in order to be beautiful.” In other words, I believed that my worth was based on my outward appearance.

At the same time I was running cross-country, I was also playing basketball. Unlike the girls on my cross-country team, my teammates on my basketball team were not having conversations about fat grams in bagel brands. They could down a fast-food burger in no time at all and not think twice about it. And my coach certainly thought I could use a few burgers myself in order to put on some weight for my position as forward or center. There was

another conversation going on though within basketball that was just as influential and just as damaging as the one on my cross-country team. It really wasn't a conversation at all. It was a coach with a temper who could fire off a cuss word, stomp his feet, clap his hands, and throw water, attempting to motivate us to play better and harder. Failing to live up to his expectations and thinking my significance was based on success as he defined it led me to believe another lie: "My worth is based on my outward performance." Failure to perform well led me to inflict punishment on myself, which matched perfectly with the motivation behind the other lie—if I didn't live up to my coach's expectations, then I didn't deserve to eat. As we have already seen, these twin themes of body image and performance are still at the heart of young women's search for beauty and worth today. But it is not just young women. Women of all ages struggle with defining their significance by their appearance and achievements.

By the time I was in college, my addiction to thinness and fitness was raging. *But God* intervened. I still remember sitting in my Hebrew class during my final exam with tears streaming down my face as I translated the verses in Jonah 2:5–6 from Hebrew to English:

The waters surrounded me, even to my soul;
The deep closed around me;
Weeds were wrapped around my head.
I went down to the moorings of the mountains;
The earth with its bars closed behind me forever;
Yet You have brought up my life from the pit,
O LORD, my God. (italics mine)

Deliverance would not come overnight, but this was a turning point for me. If the Lord could radically deliver Jonah from the pit he was in, then He could also deliver me from what seemed like a prison. The hope that I had not found in a secular counselor's office, a support group for those battling addictions, or a nutritionist's office I found in the Word of God. It cut through the lies and gave me truth upon which to stand. This would prove critical over the next few years as I fought for freedom from my addiction.

By the time I reached seminary, I really wanted my addiction to thinness and fitness to be over. I had recognized my sin of trying to serve two masters. I realized that fitness and food had become idols in my life. I knew this because *I had* to exercise and eat healthy every day in order to feel good about myself. I wouldn't even go without exercise and healthy eating on a vacation because somewhere along the way I started relying on exercise and healthy eating for my hope and happiness, my significance and security.

I remember keeping a journal in which I would write down every lie that came across my mind and counter it with a scriptural truth. For example, if I thought I looked fat, I challenged whether or not that was really true (it wasn't), and then I moved on to passages that spoke of God looking at the heart instead of the outside of man (1 Sam. 16:7).

At some point, I also stopped weighing myself, recognizing that it could lead me down a pathway of destruction. And I started bouncing my eyes off billboards

and magazines, recognizing those could also lead me down a pathway of deceit. So I was striving hard to put this addiction behind me. And since seminary days were filled with an immersion of studying Scripture, I was at a great place for healing.

But there was another dimension that was just as important as being immersed in truth, and that was being surrounded by the community of believers, some of whom I confided in regarding my addiction. This was helpful in numerous ways. First, I wasn't fighting alone. Individuals make terrible armies. But I had a group of sisters fighting with me. Their prayers, accountability, and encouragement meant a great deal to me. Second, when I confessed my sin to the Lord and to my sisters, it didn't seem to hold as much power over me. My sin was exposed. People knew. And in the publicity of it I began to see it for what it really was—lies I had believed. My worth isn't based on my outward appearance. It is based on the person and work of Jesus Christ. And my worth isn't based on my outward performance. It is based on the perfect performance of Christ on my behalf. It is the gospel that set me free—and continues to set me free when I'm once again tempted to believe the lies. The Lord ingrained deeply in me that Christ is enough for me. In a culture where we often compliment external beauty, even in the church, I needed someone to remind me that I'm not pretty apart from Christ, and no amount of makeovers or designer dresses will fix that. Apart from Christ, I am ugly and dead in my sins. I also needed someone to tell me that I will never perform perfectly and to

seek perfection is futile. Christ alone is perfect. Knowing the truths that I didn't have to be thin and fit to be loved; that I didn't have to perform perfectly to be accepted; and that I am beautiful, loved, and accepted in Christ because Christ has performed perfectly and died for me was tremendously freeing.

Perhaps you are ensnared in an addiction today. The book of Proverbs tells us that addictions are like having a feast in a grave (see 9:13–18).¹ We think we are in the midst of a feast when we are actually in the midst of a famine. Through this book I want to invite you to exchange the lies for the truth and to rest in Jesus Christ. He is our hope and happiness, our security and significance.

1. Edward T. Welch has written a wonderful book that I highly recommend for people battling addictions: *Addictions—A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2001).

Chapter 1

Naked and Ashamed

My husband and I got engaged and married when I was twenty-four years old. For at least eleven years, I had struggled with body image. Several of my thoughts were recorded in prayer journals, excerpts of which I will share with you throughout this book. Five months before we got married, after reading Genesis 2:25, I wrote,

I am not feeling unashamed when I think about letting Charles look at my body (on our wedding night). I begin to question whether he'll like it.... Oh, Father! Forgive me. I turn over to Psalm 139 and read that I am "fearfully and wonderfully made." You know me more intimately than Charles will ever know me, and you love me and accept me.... Charles is marrying me because he loves who I am—deep down inside.... Help me, Father, to get to the point by the night of our wedding where I can stand before him naked and not be ashamed.

Naked and Unashamed

On the sixth day of creation, the triune God created Adam and Eve: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27). John Calvin says, “God’s image was visible in the light of the mind, in the uprightness of the heart, and in the soundness of all the parts.... [It] is the perfect excellence of human nature which shone in Adam before his defection.”¹ As the Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 10, says, “God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.”

After we read in Genesis 1:31, “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good,” it is surprising to come to the verses in the next chapter that say, “And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’” (2:18). After Adam named all the animals, the narrative strikes a somber chord: “But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him” (v. 20). In another miraculous act of creation, the Lord made woman from the rib of man and then brought her to Adam. Adam’s words resound with hope fulfilled:

This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man (v. 23)

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.15.4.

The happy couple relishes the goodness of their Creator, their relationship, and the garden: “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (v. 25).

As both naked and unashamed, they knew a life you and I have never known. It was a life of perfection. Contrarily, you and I have known the pain and futility of striving after perfection in a world that is no longer perfect.

Sin and Shame

Although Adam and Eve were perfect and didn’t have to sin, they had not yet been confirmed in their perfected state, which meant they could sin. God gave them a test to see who would be king in their lives—God or the world, the devil, and their own flesh. Tragically, Adam and Eve chose the latter. Although Eve knew the kindness of the Lord and His commandments, she chose to sin by taking the fruit from the forbidden tree. Satan challenged God’s kindness, kingship, and commandment when he suggested to Eve that God’s word was not true, and Eve, in a moment of disordered desires, became a sinner and shared her disordered desires with her husband. Eve believed the lie: my ways are better than God’s ways, and my wisdom is better than His wisdom.

Hideous sin led to the first hide-and-seek game in the history of mankind, but unlike the childhood game, which is filled with laughter and squealing, this game wasn’t fun. The holy King had been disobeyed, and He was angry. No longer could Adam and Eve stand naked and unashamed. Instead, they were naked and ashamed. And not just Adam

and Eve, but all their posterity who would come from them would be born in original sin.

How did this impact the image of God in us? Calvin says, “God’s image was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him, yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity.... [It] was subsequently so vitiated and almost blotted out that nothing remains after the ruin except what is confused, mutilated, and disease-ridden.”²

Nakedness is not the problem. Sin is. God asks Adam and Eve, “Who told you that you were naked?” His follow-up question is instructive: “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” (Gen. 3:11). Sin had revealed to them that they were naked. What follows is the first blame game in the history of the world. Adam blamed Eve, and then Eve blamed the serpent. God addresses them in exactly the opposite order—first the serpent (Satan), then Eve, and then Adam. The curse on the serpent affects his fortune (“cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field”), form (“on your belly you shall go”), food (“you shall eat dust”), and fight (“I will put enmity between you and the woman”) (vv. 14–15). Eve faced sorrow with regard to her children and struggle with regard to her husband. Adam faced sweaty toil and the separation of body and soul at death. But by far the worst curse was the couple’s exile from the garden and separation from the presence of God: “So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden

2. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.4.

of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24).

Grace in the Garden

Yet there was still hope. In the midst of the curses comes blessing. First, a promise is embedded in God’s curse on the serpent that one day the Seed of the woman (Christ) will crush the head of Satan (Gen. 3:15). Second, Eve would still bear children and engage in a relationship with her husband. In fact, Adam called her name Eve because “she was the mother of all living” (v. 20). Third, Adam would still be able to work, and physical death would not be immediate.

In the midst of all the losses there were also certain things Adam and Eve didn’t lose. First, they didn’t lose being made in the image of God. Calvin says, “Christ is the most perfect image of God; if we are conformed to it, we are so restored that with true piety, righteousness, purity, and intelligence we bear God’s image.... In some part it now is manifest in the elect, in so far as they have been reborn in the spirit; but it will attain its full splendor in heaven.”³ Second, they didn’t lose their identity as male and female (Gen. 1:27). The difference in the sexes is rooted in God’s creation design and is not in any way destroyed by the fall. Women retain their purpose to help men in both the cultural mandate and the Great Commission. That we should be life-giving helpers is a privilege given to us

3. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.4.

by our Creator King. Third, they didn't lose God and His word as their authority. God was still their Creator King, and His word was still His revelation of Himself to them and their rule for all of life.

Life Outside the Garden

In Genesis 4 we learn that Eve indeed experiences both the blessing and the pain of children. Her older son, Cain, killed her younger son, Abel. But the Lord gave Eve another son, Seth, and through Seth a godly line would come. In fact, it was during Seth and his son's generations that "men began to call on the name of the LORD" (Gen. 4:26).

But godly lines aren't perfect lines. The effects of the fall are seen throughout the entirety of Scripture in the lives of both believers and unbelievers. But believers have great hope. In Christ we have been reconciled to God, are freed from His wrath and curse, are able to truly enjoy life, no longer have to fear death, and no longer face an eternity of hell. In Christ we are slowly learning what it means to once again be naked and unashamed. But we are not yet what we will be. We are still often stuck in sin and shame.

Guard Your Heart

When the Lord brought His people out of Egypt, He had already proven His great redemptive love for them. But love requires obedience, and God's people didn't know all that it meant to obey God. So He gave them the Ten Commandments. The entire book of Deuteronomy, which can be thought of as Moses's greatest sermon, contains these

commands, as well as many others. And one thing that is at the forefront of them all is an admonition for the people to guard their hearts.

One of the ways they were to guard their hearts was by remembering the redemption of the Lord (Deut. 4:9). In the face of idolatry, they were to seek the Lord with all their heart (v. 29). They were to take it to heart that the Lord was the only Creator King (v. 39). They were to love the Lord with all their heart (6:5). They were to remember the wilderness wanderings were tests of the heart (8:2). They were to know in their heart that the Lord's discipline was fatherly discipline (v. 5). They were warned that prosperity might bring a proud heart (v. 14). They were to fear God, walk in His ways, and serve Him with all their heart (10:12; 11:13). They were to circumcise their heart, giving it submissively to the Lord (10:16). In the face of idolatry and signs and wonders, they were to turn their heart in love toward the Lord (13:3). They were to guard their heart from unworthy thoughts that would injure their brother (15:9). The king of Israel was not to acquire many wives because they would probably turn his heart away from the Lord. He was to keep a copy of God's law and read it all the days of his life to keep a humble and pure heart (17:17–20). The people were to obey God's rules with all their heart (26:16). They were warned that exile would bring a trembling heart on them (28:65). And they were warned of turning their hearts away from the Lord to serve other gods (29:18). In other words, they were to believe God's

ways were better than their ways, and His wisdom was better than their wisdom.

At the end of Deuteronomy, the Lord tells the people that they will fail to guard their hearts. They will indeed be carried into exile. But He gives them a beautiful note of grace. He will bring them back to the land and circumcise their hearts so that they will love the Lord wholeheartedly and experience a joyous life (30:1–10).

How will He do this? He will send His own Son into exile to accomplish our redemption. Christ came from heaven to earth in order to give us a new heart. Without a new heart we will always turn our hearts away from the Lord to worthless idols, believing our ways and wisdom are better than God's. But in Christ we have the capability, through the Spirit within us, to say no to the idols that so easily entangle us and yes to loving, obeying, trusting, enjoying, and serving our great God.

Hannah's Heart

On the pages of redemptive history we catch glimpses of hearts turned toward the Lord in the face of the temptation to turn them toward other things. One such heart is Hannah's. Hannah's story introduces the book of 1 Samuel, which continues Israel's history soon after the time of the judges. If there was one thing the book of Judges had revealed, it was that Israel needed a godly king. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel record for us how God raised up David, a man after God's heart, as king of Israel. But first it tells us how God established Samuel as His prophet. It was Samuel

who anointed David as king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:13). As an introduction to these events, we learn of a woman named Hannah, the wife of a righteous man who faithfully worshiped the Lord. Hannah had a deep and desperate desire. She wanted children. In ancient times the ability to have children defined a woman's worth. Because children are a sign of God's great blessing (Ps. 127:3), people often viewed barrenness as a curse. A woman's family status was questionable if she didn't have children, even to the point of ostracism. This wasn't true just in Israel, but throughout the ancient Near East.⁴ To make matters worse, she wasn't her husband's only wife. His other wife, Peninnah, had children. So Hannah faced great temptation to compare herself to the other woman in her husband's life and envy the children she had been given. To make matters even worse, Peninnah "provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb. So it was, year by year" (1 Sam. 1:6).

Things were so bad that Hannah wept and refused to eat; her heart was greatly grieved. And in the midst of it her husband couldn't understand why she was so upset, asking her, "Am I not better to you than ten sons?" (1 Sam. 1:8). But this did not pacify Hannah. Instead, in her deep distress and bitter weeping, she fell on her knees in the temple and cried out to the Lord to give her a son. In return, she would give her son to Him to be a servant in

4. John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2000), 281–82.

the temple all his days. The priest accused Hannah of being drunk, when what she was really doing was pouring out her heart in prayer to the Lord. After Hannah explained the truth, the priest placed a blessing on her, asking the Lord to grant her request. It wasn't long before the Lord opened Hannah's womb, and she had a son named Samuel, the prophet who anointed David as king.

How was it that in the midst of deep desire, when it would have been easy to turn her heart away from the Lord, Hannah was able to turn her heart toward the Lord? How was Hannah able to recognize God's ways and wisdom were better than hers? There were two things Hannah did—she prayed and she praised. By praying we take our hearts to the Lord so that He can renew and restore them. Often our prayers are not answered in the way we ask as Hannah's was, but, regardless, prayer changes us. It realigns us with God's plans and purposes, His wisdom and ways. The heart comes saying, "Please let my will be done" and leaves saying, "Thy will be done."

But prayer wasn't the only thing Hannah did. Hannah also praised the Lord. She recognized His salvation, holiness, kingship, strength, knowledge, justice, power, sovereignty, protection of His children, and judgment. Hannah could give Peninnah's taunts, her husband's questioning, and Samuel to the Lord because her heart was renewed and refocused in prayer and praise. She exchanged her ways and wisdom for His. In the midst of strong desires, we must do the same. We must turn to prayer and praise in order to have a healthy heart.

Michal's Heart

In stark contrast to Hannah in the same book (in the Hebrew Bible, the English 1 and 2 Samuel is just one book), we meet another woman, Michal. Michal was Saul's daughter and had been given to David as his wife, but Michal's heart was not turned in the right direction. She believed that her ways and wisdom were better than the Lord's. When David came to Jerusalem with the ark of the Lord, leaping and dancing, "she despised him in her heart" (2 Sam. 6:16). Instead of holding David in honor as the Lord's anointed king, Michal did not find him worthy. While David turned toward prayer and praise, as Hannah did, Michal rejected these actions. Scripture ends the story of Michal on this somber note: "Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death" (v. 23). The unhealthy heart harbors contempt where there should be adoration; the healthy heart expresses adoration where there could be contempt. The unhealthy heart is filled with worldly wisdom and ways; the healthy heart is turned toward God's wisdom and ways.

Who Can Understand the Heart?

How do we know whether our hearts are healthy or unhealthy? How do we know if we are turned toward God's wisdom and ways or worldly wisdom and ways? Many of us are familiar with Psalm 1, which contrasts the righteous man with the rebellious, but there is a similar passage in Jeremiah 17, the context of which is the Lord indicting Judah for its sin. It is another of those diagnostic

tests in Scripture that reveals our lovers. Who or what has captured our heart, and why? Jeremiah writes,

Cursed is the man who trusts in man
And makes flesh his strength,
Whose heart departs from the LORD.
For he shall be like a shrub in the desert....

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD....
He shall be like a tree planted by the waters....

The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?
I, the LORD, search the heart,
I test the mind. (vv. 5–10)

Too many times I have trusted man (either myself or another person) and made flesh my strength, which means my heart has turned away from the Lord to have my satisfaction or security met in other things. What happens when we do this is comparable to a shrub in the desert, which is far from beautiful and fruitful. But when we trust in the Lord, we become like a tree planted by water with no fear of heat or anxiousness for drought. We never cease to bear fruit.

It is only in Christ that this can happen. The imagery of a tree and bearing fruit is picked up in John 15. Apart from Christ we can do nothing, but in Christ we bear much fruit and prove that we are truly Christ's disciples (vv. 5, 8). Trusting in man brings fear and anxiety, but trusting in Christ brings faith and fruitfulness, adoration

and affection. It is this faith and fruitfulness, adoration and affection, that yield a heart set on God's wisdom and ways.

Naked and Bare

Yet Scripture makes it clear that we often fall far short of faith and fruitfulness, adoration and affection. Ezekiel 16 is one of the most scandalous and shocking pictures of our salvation in Scripture. It begins with the sobering reality that Jerusalem is a faithless bride. The Lord reminds His people that their origin and birth were of pagans. No one had compassion on them at birth; instead, they were cast off into an open field. When the Lord saw Israel, He gave life to her and "made [her] thrive like a plant in the field; and [she] grew, matured, and became very beautiful. [Her] breasts were formed, [her] hair grew, but [she was] naked and bare" (v. 7).

At the age of love, the Lord covered her nakedness and entered into a covenant with her, taking her as His bride. He made her "exceedingly beautiful" and advanced her to royalty (Ezek. 16:13). She was renowned around the world because of her beauty. She was perfectly beautiful because the Lord bestowed splendor on her. But she trusted in her beauty instead of trusting in the Lord and was faithless to Him. She exchanged God's wisdom and ways for her own wisdom and ways. She gave her beauty to anyone who passed by her from other nations. "And in all [her] abominations and acts of harlotry [she] did not remember the days of [her] youth, when [she was] naked and bare" (v. 22). The Lord says, "How degenerate is your heart!...

seeing you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot.... Yet you were not like a harlot, because you scorned payment. You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband” (vv. 30–32). The Lord gathers her lovers against her in order to uncover her nakedness to them and judge her for committing adultery. He gives her into their hands, and they take her beauty and leave her naked and bare (v. 39).

Amazingly, the chapter doesn’t end with judgment. Instead, the Lord remembers His covenant: “And I will establish My covenant with you. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done,” says the Lord GOD” (Ezek. 16:62–63).

Clearly the days of being naked and unashamed were long gone. Like Adam and Eve, Jerusalem had been crowned with true beauty. The Lord had made her beautiful. Yet instead of recognizing this beauty as His gift of grace, she trusted in it and then gave it away. Instead of recognizing His wisdom and ways, she trusted in her own. As soon as she did this, she became naked and ashamed before her lovers. Don’t miss what her lovers did—they stole her beauty and left her naked and bare; they ruined her reputation; and then they killed her (Ezek. 16:39–41).

True beauty is found only in Christ. Giving ourselves to any other lover—an idol—leaves us naked and ashamed. False lovers wreck our lives, ruin our reputations, and ravage the life within us. This passage gives us tremendous

hope. False lovers don't have the final word. Jesus Christ came to make our sick hearts well and to atone for every time we have exchanged, continue to exchange, or will exchange our covenant Lord for other lovers with whom we take pleasure.

Liberty to the Captives

Christ came to set us free from our worldly wisdom and ways. Can you imagine what it would have been like for the people in the synagogue who heard Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah? He proclaimed He was the fulfillment of these words:

The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.
(Luke 4:18–19)

This verse was pregnant with meaning for those acquainted with the Old Testament. This was the Year of Jubilee! The book of Leviticus tells us that it is a year of release (25:8–22). Slaves were released from servitude. Debtors were released from debt. And landowners were released from having lost property—it was given back to them. Jesus's proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor was the greatest that Israel had ever known. Jesus had come to set free those enslaved to sin, to release sinners from their debt

of sin, and to restore paradise lost to its rightful owners, the elect of God.

These verses are filled with hope for those of us who feel captive to the addictions that beset us, blind to truth, and oppressed by sin and shame. We need the Lord to set us free, and these verses remind us that not only can He set us free, He does. His mission never fails among God's people. If we are His, then He has good news for us. No longer do we have to be poor, captive, blind, and oppressed. No longer do we have to follow our own wisdom or our own ways. We can know the riches of Christ, enjoy His freedom, see truth clearly, and understand what it means to be liberated from that which enslaves us. But is it really that easy? Don't we have to do something?

Setting of Our Hearts

In his letter to the saints at Colossae, the apostle Paul spent the first half telling them who Christ is and what He had done for them. With these facts as the foundation, he turned to the commands in the second half of his letter. In other words, he is saying something like this: Now that you know how much Christ loves you and all that He has done for you, this then is how you should live. This is how heart change happens. This is how you stop trusting in your own ways and your own wisdom and start trusting in Christ's. As we learn more of who Christ is and more of what He has done for us, our hearts will be set on things above, in the heavenly places where Christ reigns, instead

of on earthly things where the world, the devil, and our own flesh tempt us to sin.

Colossians 3 addresses how to set our hearts toward seeking things that are above.

First, know who you are. The old man has died; we are a new creation in Christ. United to Him, we have His Spirit's power at work within us. Second, know what is earthly in you. We need to recognize that we are prone to sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, covetousness, idolatry, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, and lying. We need to call sin, sin and recognize these things deserve God's wrath. Third, know what you need to put on as God's chosen people who have the power of the Holy Spirit within them. We need to strive to put on compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace, and thankfulness. Finally, know truth, teach truth, sing truth, and act on truth. If the word of God doesn't dwell in us, we will believe the words of the world, the devil, and our flesh. The heart set on things above is the heart that knows its identity is in Christ, recognizes its sinfulness, believes God's power is sufficient to put on a heart of love, and strives to know, teach, sing, and act on truth. It is the heart that sings of God's wisdom and God's ways.



I know I'm not the only one who has suffered from a poor body image. I have prayed for and counseled others through high school, college, seminary, and all my single and married life. One thing I have learned is that a degree, career, boyfriend, or marriage doesn't solve body image problems. But the gospel does. And so I hope that throughout the pages of this book you will be encouraged, edified, educated, and equipped. I pray you will learn how deeply this problem affects women, be reminded that our body image must come from Scripture alone, and have renewed hope that in Christ we are accepted not on our appearance, but on Christ's active and passive obedience.

THINKING ABOUT THESE THINGS

1. Describe a time when you have felt naked and ashamed.
2. What have you learned in this chapter about why we feel naked and ashamed?
3. How did Hannah's story affect your thinking about your present heart's desire?
4. Contrast Hannah's heart with Michal's. When have you recently yielded to God's ways and wisdom, and when have you recently relied on your own ways and wisdom?

5. What did you learn from Ezekiel 16 about false lovers versus your true lover, the Lord God?
6. How does Luke 4:18–19 apply to body image battles?
7. What did you learn from Colossians 3 about how to turn your heart toward the Lord?
8. Spend time in prayer today using Psalm 139. Slowly read it out loud. How do the words challenge you? Convict you? Comfort you? Change you?