

Mirror Mirror on the Wall

by Leslie Vernich

When you look in the mirror who do you see? Do you see a woman who is attractive, competent, valued, and loved? Or, are you more likely to see yourself as flawed, ugly, inferior, and unloved?

Our internal picture of ourselves begins at birth when we look into our mother (or caregiver's) face and take into ourselves what is reflected back to us. Does our mom smile when we coo? Is she attentive and soothing when we cry? Do people clap when we take our first step?

In a healthy environment, infants see themselves as loved, wanted, and valued. Being raised by loving parents gives us a solid foundation for a good self-image, but no one escapes childhood without a few scars. Those who did not have loving caregivers are more deeply wounded.

When I was a child, I never liked being me. I wasn't pretty enough, smart enough, or skinny enough. I was never invited to the birthday parties of the popular girls in my school, and I always saw myself as inferior.

Sometimes I tried to become someone else. I'd copy one of the more popular girls laugh, or outfit, or hairstyle, hoping that if I could look or become more like her, people would then like me. But I never felt cared about or secure in my relationships because I knew that the person they liked wasn't the real me. I saw myself as a fake.

As adult women, we still battle these same feelings don't we? We tell ourselves that we're not as pretty, or as together, or as spiritual, or organized, or loving as other women we see. We compare and contrast our lives and our thighs and ask ourselves, "Do I measure up? Am I good enough?" In addition, we're constantly scanning the faces of those around us, silently asking, "How do you see me? Am I loved, worthy, and valuable to you?"

The foundation for a healthy self-concept rests in the assurance that we are loved, but human love (no matter how good) will never be enough or without some pain. It is only God's infinite and unconditional love that can correct and heal our faulty self- image.

When I began to take my eyes off myself and my flaws and imperfections and put them on God, I began to see myself differently. I stopped looking at myself through my mother's eyes, which told me I was unloved and unwanted. I stopped looking at myself through other people's eyes, which sometimes made me feel wonderful, but more often reminded me that I was inadequate and flawed and never enough.

Seeing myself through God's eyes gave me an entirely different picture of who I am and what I was made for. I discovered that God doesn't want to change me into another person, but he does want to change me. He wants me to be the best possible me so I am free to serve Him without fear and

morbid self-consciousness. He wants to heal and transform the lies, the wounds, and yes, even the sins that have kept me from becoming the person he created me to be.

If you're struggling with a negative self-image, the ultimate makeover isn't done at the cosmetic counter, the gym, in a fancy department store, or by a plastic surgeon, but by God. Psychologist David Benner writes, "Genuine self knowledge begins by looking at God and noticing how God is looking at us. Grounding our knowing of ourselves in God's knowing of us anchors us in reality, it also anchors us in God."

The apostle Paul tells us because of what Christ did for us on the cross, God sees us as "holy and blameless before him, presented without a single fault." But he cautions us not to forget who we are, because when we do, we'll feel those old insecurities creep back in (Colossians 1:21-23).

Here are a few things you can do to help you see clearly.

1. Meditate on God's Word. Despite your perceptions, the truest thing about you is what God says about you.
2. Since Jesus is the exact representation of what God is like (Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 1:3), look at how Jesus interacted with people. Notice how they changed the way they saw themselves when they looked at God looking at them. (For starters, read the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:2-10, and the Samaritan woman in John 4:4-30).
3. Stop the negative self-talk. When you become aware that you're comparing yourself with others or putting yourself down or allowing someone else's gaze to diminish you, tell yourself to stop it. You are no longer going to be controlled by those habits. Instead look up and see God looking at you.