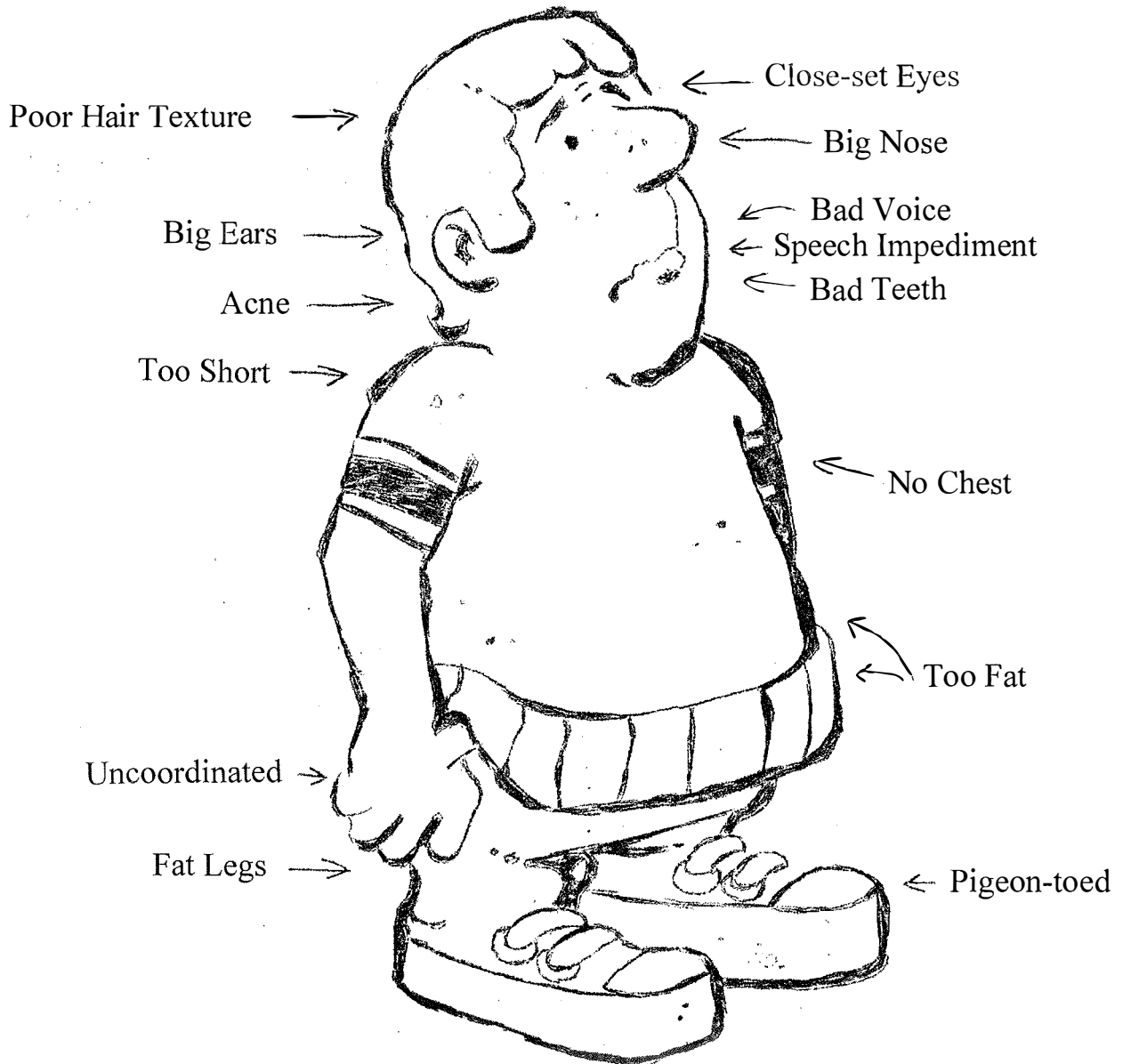


CHAPTER 1

How Do I See Myself and Others?

What kind of self-image do I have? What do I think of myself? Do I accept myself just as I am, or would I like to be more like someone else? ("I wish I were as good-looking as him/her." "I wish I had a body like his/hers." "I wish I had his/her abilities.") Do I hate the way I look? Do I wish I could change the way I look? Do I blame God or my parents for the way I am?

I must take a good, honest, realistic look at myself (be it ever so painful!):



[Note, the above illustration is taken from *Discussion Manual for Student Relationships* (Volume 1) by Dawson McAllister and Dan Webster (Moody Press).]

Here is a list of what seem to be physical shortcomings that might affect us. How well are we able to accept ourselves and the God who made us (circle some that might pertain to you):

| | | | |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|
| too fat | bad voice | no chest | scars |
| too short | big feet | deformed | impediment of speech |
| too tall | fat legs | acne (pimples) | poor eyes |
| big nose | skinny legs | big ears | bad teeth |
| uncoordinated | close-set eyes | birth mark | poor hair texture |
| bowed legs | _____ | _____ | _____ |

The problems we might have with our outward physical appearance are minor compared to the problems we have on the inside, due to our old, sinful nature which we received from Adam.

A mirror gives us an accurate glimpse of what we look like on the outside. Through the mirror we can see every facial feature, including every pimple, blemish or speck of dirt that may be there. If the mirror reveals a dirty face, then this drives us to the soap and water so that we can fix the problem.

God has a very special mirror that reveals what everyone of us is really like on the inside. It is not pleasant to look into this mirror, and it can be very uncomfortable, because we do not like to see ourselves in this way. The mirror is found in Romans 3:10-19. Turn to that passage and read the verses slowly. Remember, this is how God sees us, and God is perfectly holy (set apart from all that is sinful). Another mirror that God has given to us is found in Mark 7:21-23. Read these verses carefully. The Lord Jesus is here describing the heart of man. It is not a pretty picture.

Looking into these mirrors should cause us to recognize that we have a serious problem. If a mirror reveals a dirty face, it should drive us to the soap and water. If a mirror reveals a sinful heart, it should drive us to the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, the only One who can take away our sins and cleanse us completely from our inner uncleanness. Have you been washed by the blood of the Lamb (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11)? Have you received complete forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43)? Before you can get clean, you first must recognize your filthiness. Before you can get healed of your sinful heart disease, you must first recognize how sin sick you really are (compare Luke 5:30-32). Then you must recognize that Jesus Christ is your only Solution. He is God's only Saviour. You cannot cleanse yourself and you cannot heal yourself. God must do it. You must simply trust Him. "B _____ on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be _____" (Acts 16:31).

If you have received the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, then you are able to see yourself in a right and healthy way and you are able to have a wholesome and realistic self-image of yourself. To help you with this, there are at least six important facts which you must keep in mind:

Fact Number 1--We Must Not See Things From the World's Point of View.

The world we live in is all caught up in beauty and outward appearance. Prime importance is placed on how a person looks. "Beauty" and "body" are all important. Those who are physically attractive often seem to be more popular, more successful and even happier. Explain and discuss how the emphasis is placed upon looks/body/clothes in each of the following: 1) television 2) advertising 3) the fashion industry 4) beauty contests 5) magazines 6) _____

Is the world correct in its thinking? Is outward appearance really all important? Is there something more important about a person than just looks/body/clothes? In Ephesians 4:18 we learn that the **Gentiles** (those who are outside of Christ--Eph. 2:12) have their understanding _____, and they are ignorant and do not see things correctly because of the _____ of their heart. When it comes to seeing what is really important in a person, the world is totally blind and without understanding. As Christian believers we **must not** get all caught up in putting the wrong values on outward appearance; in fact, it is a sin to do this. God says, "Be not _____ to this world, but be ye _____ (an inward change and transformation) by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). We must not think as the world thinks. We must not see things as the world does. We must not let the world squeeze us into its mold and force us to accept its distorted values.

Consider Proverbs 31:30: "**Favour** (this word means "charm" or "gracefulness" and it refers to the form and outer appearance of a woman) is deceitful and _____ is vain, but a woman that feareth the _____, she shall be praised." The world looks at a woman's charm and beauty; God looks at a woman's **inner beauty**. We must begin to learn to see people as God does, not as the world does.

External beauty is deceitful. The Hebrew term refers to that which deceives and disappoints. What you see is not really what you get. It seems that you are looking at a very beautiful person, a very special person, but the surface appearance belies the inner person. The woman's outer charm covers up her inner deformity. It would be like a nut with a fine looking shell, but when you crack it open you find that the nut inside is rotten and undesirable. Beautiful actresses and supermodels are often known for their broken marriages, substance abuse, personal problems, etc. indicating that under the external shell there lives a sinful and very troubled person who needs God's transforming grace.

External beauty is vain. It is like a vapour or breath. It describes that which is evanescent (tending to vanish like vapour). It is used of that which soon vanishes away, like vapour or a bubble. The term "vain" is used of the vanity of idols. It is used in Psalm 39:5,11, "man at his best state is altogether vanity." It is the key word in the book of Ecclesiastes to describe the meaninglessness and emptiness of life under the sun apart from God ("vanity" used 31 times). External beauty is not long lasting. It is here today; gone tomorrow.

There is great emphasis in our day on external beauty. Makeup is used in such abundance that Jezebel would feel right at home in our society (2 Kings 9:30). All kinds of supplements and health products are offered to try to help people look young and attractive, and to slow down nature's natural deterioration. Surgical procedures are offered which can change and improve a person's outward appearance. Diet programs and exercise programs garner millions of dollars from people who want to look good and feel good. Television shows are devoted to showing how a homely looking person can be transformed and made over into an attractive person by means of makeup, hair styling, weight loss, exercise, surgery, etc. There is no end to the attempts of mankind to beautify and try to preserve the external.

External improvement and transformation projects can only last so long. A beautiful woman may win a beauty contest, but she is not going to win one thirty years later! Beautiful actresses grow old and in spite of all they do to preserve their youth, they lose the battle with time and their beauty deteriorates. External beauty can be marred and scarred by injury, serious burns, disease, etc., and this can happen even to those who are young. Time will always win, and all humanity will ultimately decline, and end up as dust (Gen. 3:19; Eccl. 3:20; Psalm 103:14; 104:29).

But a woman who feareth the LORD, she shall be praised! Proverbs 31:30

Inner beauty comes from a right relationship with the Lord. True beauty is impossible apart from the fear of the Lord. When the Lord is enthroned within, His glory will shine without. "And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it" (Psalm 90:7).

Fact Number 2--When God Made Me, He Did Not Make a Mistake.

Did you ever wish you could change the way you look and give yourself a different color and texture of hair, or a different face or a different body? Did you ever wish you could see a plastic surgeon and allow him to reshape and remake you into a new person? [*Note:* Even if he could make some outer changes, you would be the same person on the inside!] Why are you the way you are? Are you an accident of nature? Are you the product of a freak genetic mutation? Are you the descendant of some apelike creature? No, the Bible says in John 1:3 that "ALL things were _____ by Him (Christ)." Does that include you? _____

Thus, you have been made and created by **an all-wise, all-knowing, loving, perfect God** who does all things well, and who has never made even one mistake in all of eternity! One of the things that this wonderful God did was to make YOU! Read Psalm 139:13-15 to see what David said about this Creator-God. In verse 14 David said, "I will _____ (this word means "praise" or "thank") Thee; for I am _____ and _____ made: marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well."

Are you able to say what David said? Do you see yourself as one who is wonderfully made? Have you thanked God for the way He made you or are you unhappy about the body that God has given to you? Can you think of others who are physically more handicapped than you (no legs, no arms, blind, deaf, dumb, paralyzed, etc.)? Are they important people just as much as you are, or are they inferior people because they lack outward beauty and a sound body? Why does God allow such things, and who is to blame? Consider John 9:1-3.

Fact Number 3--There is Something Far More Important Than Outward Appearance.

What is the difference between the way man looks at people, and the way God looks at people (1 Samuel 16:7)?

Name _____

Read 1 Peter 3:3-4, a passage that shows how a woman can have true beauty! Which verse describes the outward appearance? _____ Which verse describes the inner person which ought to radiate true beauty? _____ Consider Miss America, Mr. Universe or the most beautiful/handsome person you know. What is true about this person's body and outward appearance? Check those statements that are true:

- _____ This person will remain beautiful/handsome forever.
- _____ This person will grow old and eventually will become wrinkled.
- _____ This person will someday die, and the body will decompose, rot, decay and return to dust (Genesis 3:19).
- _____ This person is likely to win a beauty contest (woman) or weight-lifting contest (man) at age 89.
- _____ The soul of this person will live on forever.

Consider an Egyptian mummy. The Egyptian man or woman who was embalmed or mummified may have been very handsome or beautiful at one time. Would you like to open the mummy and examine the outward appearance thousands of years after the person has died? You may not consider yourself attractive, but you are certainly more attractive than a mummy! In light of these facts, is there something more important than outward appearance?

Fact Number 4--We Must Concentrate on What We Can Change, Not on What We Cannot Change.

Every person has inherited certain physical traits from his or her parents, and for the most part, these things cannot be changed. These would include such things as a person's height, color of eyes, size of nose, texture of hair, etc. Man is limited in his ability to change the basic aspects of his physical body. There are some aspects of our physical frame which can be changed to a certain degree. For example, through proper diet and discipline, a person can change the size of his waistline. Or, through a body-building program of exercise a person can increase the size of certain muscles. In general, however, there is a real limitation as far as physical change is concerned. To a large measure, our physical body and appearance has been genetically determined by the wisdom and providence of our loving Creator.

Though there is much about my body I cannot change, it is possible to change the kind of person I am! With God's help, man is able to change and develop his inward personality and character. I may be grumpy, unkind, unthankful, disrespectful, unloving, bitter, angry, lustful, greedy, jealous, critical, selfish, proud or many other things, but ***I do not have to be like this forever!*** These are all traits which I inherited from Father Adam, but God has provided salvation through Christ and even the power to change (2 Cor.5:17; 2 Cor. 3:18). It is the inner ugliness that I should worry about, not the outer ugliness. How beautiful is my ***inner man?*** I may not be able to change the color of my eyes, but I can surely change what I allow my eyes to see. I may not be able to change the size or shape of my mouth, but I can surely change what I allow to come out of your mouth!

God says to every Christian: "BE YE T_____ " (Rom. 12:2).

Fact Number 5--God Wants Me to Have a Healthy Countenance.

Let's define "countenance"—

"Countenance is the expression of the face which reveals the inner condition of the heart"

What takes place on the inside of a person often shows on the face. If you do not believe this, next time you get angry, go look in the mirror! Or, the next time you notice someone else becoming angry, see if his (her) countenance changes visibly.

What is the secret of having a cheery and happy face (Proverbs 15:13)?

_____ Should we concentrate on fixing the outside or the inside (compare Proverbs 25:20)? _____ A healthy heart which is right with the Lord will naturally and normally produce a healthy countenance (see Psalm 42:11; 43:5).

Consider identical twins who both have the same physical appearance. Suppose one is depressed and discouraged and downhearted (just received a bad report card--four C's and two D's) and the other is filled with joy and gladness (just received a good report card--straight A's). Would you be able to notice a difference in the outer appearance of these two people? _____ Do you see how the condition of the **heart** (the inner man) will be reflected in the person's countenance and outward appearance? Therefore, changing the inner man will even help to change the outer man! Changing the inner man will do far more than wigs, make-up, plastic surgery, or anything else people may try! Trying to change the outer will not help the inner. Changing the inner will certainly help to change the outer!

Fact Number 6--I am a Very Important Person to God.

Would a person sacrifice his most valuable possessions for the sake of another person if he did not consider the person important? _____ Would a man go to war, leaving his family behind and being willing to sacrifice his very life, if he did not believe that his country and freedom were important? _____ Therefore, how does John 3:16 prove that God considers us very important?

Am I of value to God (compare Matthew 10:31)? _____ How important is God to me? How much value do I place on Him and His Word? God has accepted me and wants to do great things in me. Have I accepted myself?

Acknowledgements: Some of the material in this chapter, including the illustration at the beginning, was adapted from *Discussion Manual for Student Relationships* (Volume 1) by Dawson McAllister and Dan Webster (Moody Press).