



## WHAT IS YOUR BEAUTY NARRATIVE?

*It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with  
the people in her city who refused to obey God.*

—Hebrews 11:31

*I'll never forget the day when a woman came up to me and said,  
"No, you could never be on a magazine cover. Your face features  
don't work; your eyes are small, you have a small face but a big  
nose." I was only 14, and I had never noticed any of that stuff, you  
know?!*

—Gisele Bündchen, supermodel

**I**t's hard to believe that anyone could have ever said anything negative about supermodel Gisele Bündchen's face or body. However, Gisele is not immune to the inner struggle regarding beauty that we all must manage. Look at her words above and notice how her quote begins with the phrase: "I'll never forget . . ."

Think about the defining moments you've experienced in your family of origin, at school, or in the workplace. How have those defining moments shaped your relationship with the topic of inner or outer beauty? These experiences are all a part of your personal beauty narrative.

If we are not observant at the onset or reflective in the conclusion, we may go for years without realizing that a story line is being created and miss the impact that the plot has on our heart, mind, and behavior. It is amazing how an ongoing story of related or unrelated events, situations, and statements coagulates and then crystallizes in our hearts and minds. The collection of story lines becomes our beauty narrative and impacts what we think about ourselves or how others see us. Most important, we should not think that the evolution of our beauty narrative ends when we become adults. Too often, we ignore defining moments during our adult years that create disharmony in our relationship with inner and outer beauty.

Do any of the following statements describe words or phrases you've heard in your lifetime?

“Pretty girls like you should have anything they want.”

“Fatty-fatty, two-by-four, can't get through the kitchen door.”

“Your skin's so dark, you'd disappear at night.”

“You're so ugly that (fill-in-the-blank).”

Our beauty narratives are a mixture of positive and negative events and circumstances. Here is some insight into my childhood beauty narrative:

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Barbara Louise. Young Barbara loved to ride her pink bike up and down the sidewalk and watch cartoons. Most of all, little Barbara loved to gather together with her favorite little girl cousins to play with their dolls. Each afternoon, the little girls gathered to travel into a magical dreamland with the most perfect doll of them all . . .

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I've lived my life in the shadow of a creature known for her flawless perfection and radiant beauty. Although not as popular now as in years past, she was once worshiped by millions of little girls and grown women around the world. Although dozens of wannabes have emerged looking to claim a share of her former glory, her reign as the greatest of all time continues. Even though she never failed to maintain her perfect smile and innocent gaze, her presence taunted me as a child, but I couldn't say why. Her name: Barbie.

When I was a child, Barbie dolls were everywhere. Little girls adored the eleven-and-a-half-inch tall plastic doll with an anatomically impossible skinny waist, long blonde hair, doe-shaped eyes, freakishly long eyelashes, silky straight (and static-prone) hair, and an enviable arched foot. My cousins and I would dress our Barbie dolls in luxurious, shiny polyester gowns with Velcro zippers and stiletto plastic heels. We dreamed that our dolls had high-paying jobs, lived in palatial estates, and came home every night to handsome husband Ken. In our eyes, since Barbie was beautiful, she had to be rich. Our dolls were living out fantasies that we hoped existed in reality. In our immature eyes, those Barbie dolls were perfect—and perfection meant that anything was possible.

During our playtime, there was always a moment when at least one of my cousins would point out that, even though I shared Barbie's name, I looked nothing like her. And I agreed. I was a quiet, brown-skinned little girl with large, round glasses and big front teeth. I often wondered how I could share a name with a creation so perfect. You see, as a little girl, I hoped that I could be many things when I grew up, but beautiful would never be one of them. Since our quartet of giggly girls agreed that Barbie was beautiful and I didn't look like Barbie, the pages of my beauty narrative opened, and the first line went something like this: "Since I do not look like the pretty Barbie dolls, then I cannot be pretty. If I am not pretty, then I should not dream of all of the things that pretty little girls should dream about."

Every woman has a beauty narrative. Most of them remain unspoken until we sense that there is a safe place to release our summation. Yet, whether those beauty narratives remain spoken or unspoken, they still impact our lives.

Sometimes, I'll hear a woman brag about how beautiful she is—and how other women should be envious of her looks. As much as I want to accept her statement as genuine, I cannot help but wonder about her beauty narrative and what kinds of statements, circumstances, or events she has absorbed and converted into such brassy proclamations. I wonder whether beneath the bold words there is a beauty narrative filled with circumstances that were the opposite of what she wants us to think.

Here is one powerful story shared by a *Created with Curves* survey participant reflecting a beauty narrative that still impacts her life today:

As an incest survivor, I was told that I was ugly and fat and would never amount to anything, and I have believed that in my heart my whole life.

I worked my tail off in high school to get thin, but it didn't make me happy, and I was still called "the great white whale" after losing over fifty pounds eating cheddar cheese, cucumbers, and Diet 7-Up for months.

Today, I am close to four hundred pounds; my body is a time bomb; I need hip replacements. I lost my parents to diabetes, and I am now diabetic as well. I am dying in the same ugly way my parents did. I can't make myself stop eating because I know it won't make me happier. Now that I am also blind, I can't use makeup because I would have it everywhere, and I've had one haircut in five years because I can't afford to have it cut.

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I know that what I was told as a child shouldn't still affect me as a 47-year-old woman, but once it is drilled into your head over and over and over, it becomes too real to fight.

Some of you know exactly how she feels. You've struggled with a statement or event that happened to you long ago, and in quiet moments, that narrative sneaks in and hijacks your hope, your peace, and any attempt you make at seeing yourself as beautiful.

What you need to know is that those whispering thoughts are not the truth about who you are. Those thoughts might be a memory, but they are not your reality. That narrative does not define who you are!

## BEAUTY NARRATIVES FOR CHRISTIAN WOMEN

As a Christian woman who has struggled with the topic of beauty, I believe that evaluating our individual beauty narratives is essential to living in God's truth regarding our existence as His beloved creation. Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world, and what we hear, see, and experience is often a reflection of our sinful nature.

If that is the case, then why does the topic of outer beauty produce a weary sigh among Christian women? Why should we dismiss the opportunity to have a legitimate conversation about how our inner beauty and outer beauty can—and should—intersect and complement each other?

Over the years, I have received numerous invitations to speak about the topic of beauty. It's a topic that all women care about. However, I noticed that my talks were about the inner qualities of beauty, but the conversations that women were having with one another were about worries over physical beauty. There was a tremendous disconnect, yet no one wanted to admit it.

For some reason, we've deemed it unspiritual to talk about beauty. Yet we harbor all kinds of secret language and beliefs.

Here are some common statements from beauty narratives of Christian women:

“God only cares about my heart, not what I look like.”

“Doesn’t the Bible say that charm is deceitful and beauty is vain?”

“Only vain women care about hair and makeup.”

“If I am vocal about my desire to dress or look attractive, people may not think I am truly a Christian.”

I hope that you are willing to think through, even write down, the beauty narratives that have impacted your life. There are messages that you’ve absorbed about how you look, and those messages must be held up in the light of God’s truth. Your life story may not read like a fairy tale, but trust me, friend, God can change any narrative.

## RAHAB’S NEW NARRATIVE

Rahab was a prostitute in the Old Testament. We don’t know much about her life, but the word *prostitute* fills in a lot of blanks. Chances are, she was shunned by her community and her family was ashamed of her occupation. This was probably not what Rahab hoped that she would grow up to be; but in ancient society, an unmarried woman, like a widow with no male relatives to care for her, would often turn to prostitution in order to survive.

Imagine that you are Rahab. Imagine the words you hear each day from the men who use you or the women who sneer at you while you shop in the marketplace or do laundry in the river. Day after day, Rahab was inundated with negative statements about who she was and what she did. Of course, in the quiet moments between customers, Rahab would undoubtedly repeat those same things to herself: “I am worthless” or “This is all I ever will be.”

In Joshua 2, there were some Israelite spies doing some advance scouting around the town of Jericho, following God’s direction. We

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don't know how the men ended up at Rahab's home. We don't know if they realized that she was a prostitute. All we know is that Rahab protected the men from certain death—even misleading the king of Jericho to save their lives. As a result of her interactions with those spies, Rahab's narrative takes a radical twist.

In Joshua 6, Israelite leader Joshua comes back to rescue Rahab and her family. He saves them from the slaughter happening in the city of Jericho. Since Scripture repeatedly refers to her as “Rahab the prostitute,” there was no doubt that Joshua knew who he was saving. It must have been quite heady for Rahab to flee the carnage in Jericho by stepping over the slain bodies of the men and women who had called her names and made her feel ugly on the inside and out.

Rahab's story line is not mentioned again in the Old Testament. We don't know about her life after being rescued, but in the early New Testament, we discover her name in Jesus' lineage—she probably would have never seen that coming! Then, we cross paths with Rahab again in Hebrews 11, a chapter known as the “Hall of Faith” in the Bible. Rahab's act of faith was specifically called out in a chapter filled with the heroic acts of faith of key Old Testament leaders and countless, nameless God worshipers. Even though her early beauty narrative was filled with ugly experiences, God redeemed Rahab's life and wrote her a new narrative, one filled with honor and legacy.

My friend, I don't know your beauty narrative or the impact that it has had on your life. Surely, we all have some messages that have nicked and wounded our souls. Yet God has a beauty narrative waiting for you—a story line in which you are treasured and valued for who He has created you to be.

### BEAUTY MARK

*No matter the early chapters of your life story, God's narrative for your life includes beauty and purpose.*

## GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What are some of the beauty narratives that have had an impact on your life?*
- 2. Sometimes, women are reluctant to admit that there are still some beauty narratives that sting. Often, we pretend that the damage doesn't exist when it really does. What is the harm in ignoring or denying harmful beauty narratives?*
- 3. Barb shared how her name and Barbie dolls impacted her beauty narrative. What were some of the people and experiences that impacted your beauty narrative?*
- 4. The beauty of Rahab's story is that, even though there was a lot of ugly, one important twist in her life story changed everything. No matter how you feel about yourself or your beauty narrative, name something that you are proud of or a facet of your personality that blesses or nurtures others.*

## PERSONAL JOURNALING QUESTIONS

- 1. Is there any memory or other thought that has surfaced as a result of this chapter? Just make a note of it as well as how you feel about it now and any reflections you might have now.*
- 2. What are the positive beauty narratives that you have experienced? When did you hear or experience them, and how have they impacted your life?*
- 3. Are there any beauty narratives that are severely damaging how you see yourself? How has that narrative hurt or harmed you?*



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