



Summer 2004 *Go! Online* Bible Study

Seven Lies About Our Looks

Materials:

- *Go! Online* Download Video: “Look in the Mirror Lately?”
- Computer, monitor, or video projector to display video
- Copies of *Go! Online* Group Activity for “Seven Lies About Our Looks” (one per student, as described below)
- Copies of Summer 2004 *Go!* magazine for each student (unless they’ve already been distributed)

Video Introduction:

When you’re ready to begin your study, prepare to play the *Go! Online* download video called “Look in the Mirror Lately?” It is 3 minutes, 53 seconds long, and it features a group of Christian students answering questions about body image. It’s intended to help your group focus on the issue of body image as you begin your study.

Before playing the video clip, ask your group to think about how they would answer the questions asked. If you have extra time for discussion, you could watch the clip in segments, asking your students to discuss their answers to each question after watching the students on the video.

Group Activity:

Hand out the copies you made of the *Go! Online* group activity for this study. You should have one for each student. Explain the following in your own words:

The sheets I’m handing out have seven statements listed on them. Take a couple of minutes to read through each statement and decide in your own mind whether you think it is true or false—but don’t write down your answers yet. Just keep them in mind as we work through each statement in today’s study.

Transition:

Explain the following in your own words:

In today’s culture, there’s a huge emphasis on how we look—the shape of our bodies, the clothes we wear, our hairstyles. The media and some social groups, especially, push us to spend a lot of time thinking about our weight, our size, our clothing and how we fit in with the rest of the world.



Even people who don't want to be controlled by that sometimes spend a lot of time and money trying not to look like everyone else. For teens, the pressure can get out of control. Today, we're going to look at seven lies and half-truths about body image and style.

Here's our big question: How should our belief in God and His Word change the way we think about our appearance? He understands how badly we want to look good and be accepted by our parents, friends and the opposite sex. But He also knows that we cause ourselves lots of unnecessary pain by trying to live up to a bogus standard of physical appearance.

1. True or False: How I look has to be a major part of who I am.

Some people desperately want you to believe this lie. We call them retail advertisers and fashion magazine editors. They want you to define yourself by your brand of makeup, your style of shoes, and how old your T-shirt is. They want you to think that what you wear or how many pounds you're carrying around actually changes the person you are.

We know why they do it, don't we? If we believe that our appearance changes who we are, we'll pay them a lot of money to make us better people. The harder questions are, "Why do we believe it? Why do we let them decide who we think we are?"

So how should Christians define themselves?

What's Inside?

Who is the most important relationship in your life? For believers, there's only one good answer—we hold our relationship with God above all else. So a good question about physical appearance might be, "Does God care what I look like?"

Here's what God told the Old Testament prophet Samuel when someone suggested David didn't look good enough to be king of Israel: "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV).

Clearly, God doesn't identify you by your wardrobe or hair color or number of piercings. He defines you by what's inside—by what's going on in your heart. He also defines you by what He's done in your life.

We Are God's Creation

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27, NIV).

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Psalm 139:13-14, NIV).



Our true identity starts with the fact that God created us in His image. That doesn't mean we look exactly like Him; it means we're patterned after Him in who we are. As a person put together by Him on purpose for a purpose, you are one of His works of art. Your appearance can never change that fact.

We Are Loved

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, NIV).

Another aspect of our identity comes from the fact that God loves us. He proved it when He sent His only birth Son to die in our place. That's huge love. Your I.D. as a loved one of God never changes—whether you're wearing Wal-Mart brand or Tommy Hilfiger.

We Are God's Children

“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16-17, NIV).

As a believer, being overweight or underweight or just the right weight can never change the fact that you are in God's family. He's your Father, and you are His child.

We Are Commissioned

“For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10, NIV).

Another huge part of your identity has to do with your job—not what you get paid to do, but what God has called you to do. Every believer is called by God to do good works. Those include telling others about Jesus; treating others with kindness; giving ourselves away in service to God's church. For each of us, that mission will look a little different, but we're all called to get busy.

So, as a believer, your identity includes being created by God, being loved by Him, being in His family, and being called by Him to do things that matter. Compared to that list, how much does it matter what you're wearing, what you weigh or how tall you are? Your appearance isn't the real you.

2. True or False: If I just work hard enough (or diet enough or get enough surgery or get the right clothes), I could become physically perfect.

We all have this picture in our heads of what we wish we looked like, and some of us think that we could actually reach physical perfection if we just worked at it hard enough—or had enough money to spend on cosmetic surgery. But it will never happen.

“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:20-21, NIV).

First of all, there's no such thing as perfect in this fallen world. All of creation is suffering under the consequences of sin. Nothing in all of creation—including our physical appearance—can ever reach perfection.

The second problem with aiming toward perfection in our physical appearance is that even if it were possible, it would be over in an instant.

“What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14, NIV).

This life isn't supposed to be perfect or complete. That's why it's so, so short. For believers, perfection will come when we're with God in heaven. Until then, we learn to trust God through the hard things and look forward to being with Him in eternity.

3. True or False: If I could look better or have nicer clothes, I'd be happier.

Sometimes, it seems like the really beautiful people with the best clothes are happier than everyone else. But they aren't. The girls most focused on losing weight are almost never happy with their weight, no matter how skinny they look to everyone else. The guys who devote themselves to working out to get just the right muscular look are often never satisfied with how they look.

Here's the other problem: to keep that look once you get it, you can never relax. You always have to keep working out. You have to keep dieting. The perfect clothes today will be out of style next year.

King Solomon put it this way in the book of Ecclesiastes: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!” (Ecclesiastes 1:2, NIV).

His point is that chasing worthless things always leads to empty feelings—even when you catch what you're chasing. There is no satisfaction in reaching some difficult standard of physical beauty.

4) True or False: I can't be satisfied with my life unless I can look good and dress right.

This is a hard lie to shake. Many of us have convinced ourselves that we can't afford to relax with the way we look, because we'll end up looking unsatisfactory forever. We refuse to be content with ourselves until we get to some standard for physical appearance.

Paul set a different standard for Christians when he said, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances” (Philippians 4:11, NIV). He was talking about finances, but the same idea also applies to being content no matter what our physical appearance is.



Even if you're trying to lose weight or find an outfit that makes you look good or get in shape, there's no point in waiting to achieve your goal to relax and feel content with what God has given to you. As we saw in the previous point, you won't find contentment in that achievement, anyway.

But how do we choose contentment when we're not happy with how we look? Here was Paul's secret: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13, NIV). Through Jesus, we can be secure in who we are even when our weight isn't perfect or we can't afford the best clothes or our nose is bigger than we wish it was. Our strength comes from Him—not how we appear to other people.

5) True or False: I can't attract good friends or a boy/girlfriend unless I can look or dress good enough.

This is a huge lie that some of us just can't seem to get away from. Think about your three or four best friends for a second. Are they all physically perfect? Do each of them dress exactly like a magazine or your favorite catalog? Would you only be friends with or go out with someone who looked the way you wish you looked?

It's a cliché, but it's true: Do you really want friends (or a boy/girlfriend) who would only spend time with you if you had the right look?

Friends and dates that would come your way over something as shallow as looking good will go away over equally shallow things. The Bible gives a much better method for attracting friends (and it's not a lousy way to attract the opposite sex, either):

"Love must be sincere. . . . Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:9-10, NIV).

And this one: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32, NIV).

We could list all kinds of verses, but you get the idea. People are drawn to those who treat them with kindness, who are real, who forgive. In other words, people like people who live like Jesus. If you treat others with His kindness, then you'll attract real friends looking for real friendship—not shallow people looking for empty relationships based on physical appearance.

6) True or False: I have to spend a lot of time and money to look good enough to be seen in certain situations.

If we believe this lie, it says a lot about what really matters to us in life. It says a lot about what we're really trusting.

Jesus said something interesting: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21, NIV).

What treasure do you have to spend in your life right now? You have time, money, and energy to invest in the things you really value. Take a minute to think about in. How much time do you invest in your appearance? On getting your look right at the start of the day? On looking for the right clothes? On thinking about food and exercise so you can live up to a standard of beauty?

There's nothing at all wrong with any of those things by themselves. However, the amount of time, money, and energy we spend on something tells us what we really care about. Now for a painful question, how much time do you spend investing in your relationship with God through prayer, Bible study, and worship?

For Christian women, especially, Peter suggested a different path to achieving real beauty: "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:3-4, NIV).

The Bible claims that women who invest their treasure in becoming beautiful on the inside through a relationship with God gain something very valuable—an unfading and eternal beauty that will show through their outer appearance even as they get older and their natural physical beauty fades.

7) True or False: It doesn't matter how I look or what I wear, as long as I'm comfortable.

Because it's so easy in our culture to get caught up in an unhealthy obsession with our physical appearance, some people give up completely. They have decided it doesn't matter ever, in any way, what they look like.

That's not completely true, either. The Bible does tell us to care about our appearance in a few ways.

Avoid Making Food an Idol

Sometimes, our appearance can be a signal to ourselves that we have an unhealthy relationship with food. Some people are overweight because of medical problems; others of us get that way because we're trying to meet needs by eating too much food and we're not getting enough exercise.

The Bible calls this gluttony or idol worship or lack of self-control. In this case, God encourages us not to let food get in the way of our relationship with Him.

On the other side, some people are just naturally skinny. Others become so obsessed with controlling their appearance that they refuse to eat enough. That's equally dangerous and unhealthy—probably even more so than overeating. Someone who has serious food issues needs to ask their parents or another trusted adult for help; problems like these often can't be defeated without help from people who care about you.

Avoid Looking Unhealthy to Look “Spiritual”

Jesus warned His followers not to use their appearance as a way to call attention to their spirituality. Some hypocritical religious types were doing a lot of fasting, and they wanted everyone to know. So they went around looking hungry and sad.

As with everything else in our lives, our appearance should point people to Jesus—not to ourselves (Colossians 3:17).

Avoid Any Hint of Immorality in Your Appearance

This is a tough one these days, especially for girls. Current styles of clothing allow for lots of outfits that are revealing and tight fitting. It’s hard for Christians to know where to draw the lines. How can you honor God and still wear clothes you like?

First, what’s your motive? Paul wrote that we must run away from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18). If any part of your decision to wear a questionable outfit has to do with wanting to attract the opposite sex to your body or turn someone on, you’re on the wrong path.

Second, what effect will your outfit have on others? Sometimes, girls have no idea where their tight or revealing clothing leads guys’ minds. You can’t always help that, but you can avoid wearing things that make it easier for your brothers in Christ to stumble (Romans 14). If you’re not sure, ask your dad or your close guy friends to tell you what kinds of outfits make it hard for them to keep their minds pure.

Finally, listen to your parents and honor their direction (Ephesians 6:1). Believe it or not, Mom and Dad often have a good idea where the line is between what’s appropriate and what goes too far.

Conclusion:

Close in prayer, asking God to help you and your students to have the right attitude toward appearance. Ask Him to help you balance leading healthy lives with making an idol out of how you look. Thank Him that this life is so short and that you’ll all have perfect appearances in heaven.

Remind your students that they can read more about this topic in the article “Skin Deep” on page 48 of the Summer ’04 issue of *Go!* magazine.

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