

Becoming Spiritually Beautiful

Sharon Jaynes



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A New Kind of Beauty

Discovering God's
Transforming Power

“What’s wrong with me?” I wondered. “Why can’t I have the peace in my life I see in other people? Why don’t I have the faith I sense in Christians around me? Why do I always feel as though I am simply not good enough?”

For many years I was held captive by feelings of inferiority, insecurity, and inadequacy. I looked as though I had it all together on the outside, but on the inside I was a cowering little girl hiding in the corner of the playground, hoping no one would notice my reluctance to join in.

You might expect me to tell you, “But then I met Jesus and all my insecurities melted away.” Oh, I wish that were the case, but the insecure lost girl grew up to become an insecure Christian woman. But I’m getting ahead of myself. Let me take you on a journey through my childhood to discover the root of my inability to experience God’s peace and purpose in my life. Who knows? Maybe you’ll see yourself walking the path with me.

Like many children living through the depression in rural North Carolina, my parents graduated from high school and then said “I do” at the altar a few weeks later. Ten months passed, and they heard their first baby’s cry. Five years after my brother was born, I made my grand debut on a snowy night just a few days before Christmas.

From the very beginning, my parents had a rocky marriage. I don’t remember much about my first five years of life, but I do

remember many heated arguments and violent outbursts followed by periods of cold, passive aggression.

My father ran a building supply company and spent most of his time away from home, working or carousing with friends. And even though his place of business was only a few miles from our home, I felt that his heart was in a place I could never find. A battle raged in my little girl heart between the part of me that longed to be a daddy's girl and the part that feared to even get near him.

My family lived in a beautiful brick ranch-style home with columns on an elongated front porch and 60-foot pine trees forming a shady canopy over our roof. With two kids and a collie named Lassie, we looked like the typical all-American family. But behind the peaceful exterior loomed a deep dark secret.

My father had a drinking problem, and many nights he came home in violent fits of rage. My parents fought both verbally and physically in my presence, and I saw many things a little child should never see and heard words a little child should never hear. As a child I remember going to bed, pulling the covers up tightly under my chin, and praying that I could hurry up and go to sleep to shut out the noise of my parents yelling and fighting. During those early years, I had a pink musical jewelry box. Many nights I slipped out of bed, turned the key in the back of the box, and opened the lid to hear the beautiful music in hopes it would drown out the fighting in the next room. I pretended that I was the ballerina who popped up when the lid was opened and tried to let the music take me to a peaceful, magical place.

On several occasions, I awoke to broken furniture, my mother's black eye, and a weeping father making promises that it would never happen again.

As a little girl, even though I was very cute, I never felt pretty or acceptable. I longed to be cherished or valued, but I felt I was always in the way and a poor excuse for a daughter. I surmised that I was not pretty enough, smart enough, talented enough, or good enough to be the apple of anyone's eye. My parents loved me, but

they were wrapped up in their own struggles and didn't always know how to show it.

When I was six years old, I skipped off to school with a new box of crayons, a swiss polka-dot dress, and fresh hope that I would be accepted. But first grade only confirmed my fears. I wasn't "enough."

From the time my first grade teacher held up the first spelling flash card, I knew I was in trouble. Back in the '60s, kindergarten was optional, and while I had attended a church-sponsored kindergarten, we focused on coloring, playing, and napping. But first grade was a whole new ball game with letters, numbers, and tests.

I remember one spelling exercise that makes my palms clammy even today. We lined our miniature wooden chairs up in a row like a choo-choo train. The teacher held up a spelling flash card for us to identify the word. If we missed the word, we had to go to the caboose. I spent most of the first grade in the caboose. For some reason, I especially had trouble with the word "the."

My brother, who proved to be very smart, had had the same teacher five years earlier, and I guess she thought that somewhere in the gene pool lurked a glimmer of hope.

I'll help her, my teacher must have thought.

So she made me a name tag that said "the" and I had to wear it for two weeks. Students came up to me and asked, "Why are you wearing that tag?" "Is your name 'the'?" "You must be stupid." "What's wrong with you?"

Well, I learned how to spell the word "the," but that's not all I learned. I learned that I was stupid, not as smart as everybody else, and once again...not enough.

Inferiority, insecurity, and inadequacy became a filter that formed over my mind. And every thought I had, every interpretation of my little world, had to go through that sieve of deficiency. By the time I was a teenager, that filter was cemented firmly in place.

But God didn't leave me that way. Don't you just love the words "but God"? They are my two favorite words in the Bible. But God didn't leave me that way.

When I was 12 years old, I became friends with a girl in my

neighborhood, Wanda Henderson. We had known each other since first grade but truly bonded by the sixth. Wanda's mother took me under her wing and loved me as though I were her own child. Mrs. Henderson knew what was going on in my home, and she knew about my wounded heart. I loved being at the Hendersons' home. Mr. and Mrs. Henderson hugged and kissed each other in front of us and even had pet names for each other. I had never seen married people act like that before, and I watched in amazement. I didn't know why that family was so different from mine, but I knew that difference had something to do with Jesus Christ. Their home was a balm—an emotional spa.

Mrs. Henderson walked around their home doing housework and singing praise songs to the Lord. She even talked about Jesus Christ as though she knew Him personally. I thought that was strange.

Eventually, the Hendersons invited me to go to church with them, and I realized that most of the people in her church talked about Jesus Christ as though they knew Him personally. Amazingly, my family, with all of its struggles, went to church on Sundays. Yes, with all the alcohol and fighting, we went to a very politically correct, socially prestigious church—fighting all the way to the front door. We heard ear-tickling, nonoffensive sermons that were moral enough to make us feel we'd done our American duty, but not spiritual enough to convict or transform us in any way.

But the Hendersons' church was different. They talked about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, something I had never heard before. I wanted what they had. I went to this church and drank in every word the pastor and teachers had to say about a Savior who loved me so much He gave His life for me on Calvary's cross so that I could have eternal life. He paid the penalty for my sin. He loved me, not because I was pretty or because I could do things well, but just because I was His.

The following year, Mrs. Henderson started a Bible study for teenagers in the neighborhood, and I began a love affair with God's Word. One night, when I was 14, Mrs. Henderson sat me down on the couch.

“Sharon,” she asked, “are you ready to accept Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord?”

With tears streaming down my cheeks, I answered yes.

At the very moment I accepted Christ, my spiritual transformation was complete—I went from death to life in the blink of an eye—in the time it took for me to say, “I believe.” However, the transformation of my soul (mind, will, and emotions) had just begun.

At first my parents were leery of my “newfound religion,” but my love for the Lord was hard to resist or deny. Two years after I gave my life to Jesus, my mother accepted Him as her personal Savior. Then three years later, through a series of events, twists, and turns that only our heavenly Father could orchestrate, my earthly father gave his life to Christ. In a matter of six years, God had worked an incredible miracle in my life and my family’s lives.

But let’s go back to that 14-year-old girl who was consumed with feelings of inferiority, insecurity, and inadequacy. Did those feelings melt away the moment I accepted Christ? Did they evaporate when I said the words “I believe”? Oh, dear friend, I wish I could tell you they did, but they did not. As a matter of fact, I didn’t even know they were there.

Through the years I learned to compensate for my insecurities. If you had seen me as a teenager—seen my achievements and accomplishments—you would have never known I felt that way about myself or was in that type of bondage.

From the time I was 14 until I was in my early thirties, I always felt as though something was wrong with me spiritually—as though I had walked into a movie 20 minutes late and had to spend the entire time trying to figure out what was going on. I wondered why I struggled so to live the victorious Christian life. I had a wonderful husband, an amazing son, and a happy home life. I taught Bible studies at a scripturally solid church, and I surrounded myself with strong Christian friends. But something was missing—I didn’t know who I was. I did not understand the change that happened in me the moment I became a Christian. I didn’t understand my true identity as a child of God.

Once again, God didn't leave me that way. Something happened in my thirties. Like popcorn heating up and exploding into fluffy white clouds, certain verses of the Bible began to jump out at me: "You are chosen, and dearly loved." "You are holy." "You are a saint." I began to understand that how I saw me and how God saw me were very different. Yes, I had a spiritual makeover the moment I accepted Christ. My dead spirit became alive with Christ...born again, as Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3). But the ultimate makeover, the process of being transformed into the image of Christ, had just begun.

True Beauty

Our culture is enthralled with the idea of beauty and eternal youth, but what is true beauty? One cosmetic company made an important discovery.

A successful beauty product company asked the people in a large city to send pictures along with brief letters about the most beautiful women they knew. Within a few weeks thousands of letters were delivered to the company.

One letter in particular caught the attention of the employees, and soon it was handed to the company president. The letter was written by a young boy who was from a broken home and living in a run-down neighborhood. With spelling corrections, an excerpt from his letter said: "This beautiful woman lives down the street from me. I visit her every day. She makes me feel like the most important kid in the world. We play checkers and she listens to my problems. She understands me, and when I leave she always yells out the door that she's proud of me."

The boy ended his letter saying, "This picture shows you that she is the most beautiful woman. I hope I have a wife as pretty as her."

Intrigued by the letter, the president asked to see this woman's picture. His secretary handed him a photograph of a smiling, toothless woman, well advanced in years, sitting in a wheelchair. Sparse gray hair was pulled back in a bun. Wrinkles that formed deep furrows on her face were somehow diminished by the twinkle in her eyes.

"We can't use this woman," explained the president, smiling.

“She would show the world that our products aren’t necessary to be beautiful.”¹

The little boy had discovered a valuable truth. Beauty—true beauty—begins on the inside and works its way out.

A Little Girl’s Dream

I remember as a little girl sneaking into my mother’s closet and slipping my child-size feet into her size seven high heels. I’d also stand on my tiptoes on a chair, pull a hat off the top shelf, and plop it on my head like an oversized lamp shade. Her satin evening jacket with sleeves that hung eight inches below my fingertips gave a nice elegant touch to my outfit. A lady going to a party would never be caught without “putting on her face,” so I crept into the bathroom, opened the forbidden drawer, and created a clownish work of art on the canvas of my face. Red rouge circles on my cheeks, heaps of blue eye shadow on my munchkin lids, and smeared orange lipstick far exceeding the proper borders were finished off with a dusting of facial powder with an oversized brush.

From the time a little girl stretches on her tiptoes to get a peek in the mirror, she desires to be beautiful—perhaps just like her mommy. As the girl moves into the teen years, she experiments with makeup, delves into fashion, and attempts various hairstyles. Then it’s on to makeover ideas in magazines and on talk shows. If one idea doesn’t work—well, there’s always next month!

Americans spend more than seven billion dollars a year on cosmetics. Magazine racks bulge each month with periodicals promising dramatic makeovers for women of every shape, color, and size. They tell us how to thin thighs, firm flab, tuck tummies, build biceps, tighten tushes, and lengthen lashes. We can learn the proper way to apply makeup, choose the best hairstyles to frame and flatter facial shapes, and determine what color wardrobe is best for our particular skin tone.

The obsession isn’t limited to older women fighting the effects of aging and gravity who have expendable income. In the year 2000, American youths spent \$155 billion on beauty products and trips to salons and spas—financed by willing parents.²

Talk show hosts' most popular programs have been those with beauty makeover themes. Viewers love to watch an artist transform a frumpy middle-aged housewife into a sophisticated cosmopolitan with just a snip of the scissors, a stroke of blush, and an updated wardrobe. Silently we wonder, *Could they do that to me?*

I'm not saying I've never read the makeover articles in the magazines or tried a few of their suggestions, and I've definitely contributed to the rising expenditure for cosmetics. But I do know this—no amount of skin creams, makeup, designer clothes, or exercise regimens will make a woman feel truly beautiful, content, or fulfilled. If we're banking on outward appearance to make us happy, we're headed for emotional bankruptcy.

Cheap Nails

One of the greatest philosophers of all time is Charlie Brown, the little round-headed kid in Charles Schulz's *Peanuts* cartoon. But even Charlie Brown has his problems. One day he was visiting his psychiatrist, Lucy. Lucy is sitting pensively behind her makeshift booth, which resembles a lemonade stand. Her shingle reads, *Psychiatric Help 5¢*.

Frame one: Lucy says to Charlie Brown, "Your life is like a house..."

Frame two: "You want your house to have a solid foundation, don't you?"

Frame three: "Of course you do..."

Frame four: "So don't build your house on the sand, Charlie Brown..."

Frame five: A strong wind blows, knocking Lucy off her chair and the booth into a heap on the ground.

Frame six: "or use cheap nails."

I see many women today who have started building their spiritual houses on the solid rock of Jesus Christ, but then they proceed

to build on that foundation with the cheap nails of outward appearance, performance, possessions, power, and the praises of others. Alas, when the strong winds of adversity begin to blow, just like Lucy's makeshift psychiatric booth, we fall apart.

In 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, Paul talks about two types of building materials. One type is wood, hay, and stubble. These are what man produces. He plants and he reaps. These materials are temporary and can be burned up or lost in a moment. The other type of building material is gold, silver, and precious stones. These are what God has created, but we have to discover them—sometimes digging through mountains of dirt.

The culture's makeover ideas are temporary...wood, hay, and stubble. But the principles found in God's Word are eternal with everlasting results. We can try the beauty tips in the magazines, but true beauty occurs when we sit in God's spa and let Him perform a miracle.

Women love the idea of a day at the spa. After all, Queen Esther in the Bible stayed in a spa for an entire year before she claimed her title of Mrs. Xerxes. Her beauty regimen included six months with oils of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics (Esther 2:12). Not only that, she was assigned seven maids to take care of her every need. Now that sounds like a spa package worth looking into!

Let's face it. Women want to be beautiful. However, many fail to realize that beauty begins on the inside and works its way out. The little boy mentioned earlier discovered that beauty shines through eyes of love.

But how do you become spiritually beautiful? You will not discover the secret in magazines, talk shows, or reality TV. Inner beauty is the result of God's transforming power in the heart of a willing soul. He doesn't simply cover up our flaws; He miraculously starts from scratch and makes us new. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, [she] is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Join me now at God's spa for the ultimate beauty treatment. Your appointment has been made. God is waiting. Let's get started!