



Beauty Begins

MAKING PEACE WITH YOUR REFLECTION

CHRIS SHOOK &
CO-AUTHOR OF *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER *BE THE MESSAGE*
MEGAN SHOOK ALPHA

Praise for
Beauty Begins

“In *Beauty Begins*, Chris Shook and Megan Shook Alpha have written a vibrant, heartwarming book for women of all ages who live out the universal struggle to see themselves as beautiful. Through their personal stories, biblical insight, and practical wisdom, this mother-daughter duo gives us down-to-earth advice on how to see ourselves clearly through God’s eyes of acceptance and love. I can’t wait to share it with my granddaughters!”

—KAY WARREN, cofounder of Saddleback Church
with her husband, Rick; international speaker;
and best-selling author of *Choose Joy: Because
Happiness Isn’t Enough*

“In an age of superficial beauty and supermodel icons, our friends Chris and Megan offer a Christ-centered alternative that begins with the heart of God. Here’s a wise and wonderful guide to where true beauty begins—and to the confidence and contentment that come from it.”

—LEE AND LESLIE STROBEL, authors of *Surviving
a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*

“True beauty begins when you make peace with your reflection. That’s why Chris Shook and her daughter, Megan, have

taken the risk to talk about a topic that is often difficult for women to discuss—self-image. The result is an invitation for ladies of all ages to join this conversation.”

—PASTOR STEVEN AND HOLLY FURTICK, cofounders
of Elevation Church, Charlotte, NC

“Beauty in the eyes of the world is distorted. In *Beauty Begins*, Chris Shook and her daughter, Megan, point women of all ages to the source of true beauty: the heart of God. They reveal that God’s heart is for women to be full of beauty, full of joy, full of peace. Let Chris and Megan clear your vision and teach you the truth of who God made you to be.”

—MATTHEW BARNETT, cofounder of the Dream
Center and author of *God’s Dream for You*

*Beauty
Begins*

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**CHRIS SHOOK &
MEGAN SHOOK ALPHA**



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This book is dedicated to all the women who encourage us when we stumble, cheer for us when we succeed, and challenge us when we get too comfortable. We love doing life with you!

*Nancy. Lisa. Sarah. Kelli. Shelley. Mary. Alice.
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Note To The Reader

This book is unique in two ways. First, this book was written by a mother and daughter. Second, it is designed for girls and women of all ages. We address struggles that all women deal with daily, and we also explore the unique relationship between mothers and daughters.

In our society it is impossible not to feel inadequate at times. It's hard to make it through even one day without feeling insecure about ourselves! As a mother and daughter living in the same hurting world you live in, we will share our struggles, our joys, and how we have learned to embrace this tough yet rewarding life. We aren't saying we have figured it all out, but we have discovered some practical ways to love the person God made us to be.

As mother and daughter we've shared many of the experiences described in this book. For simplicity *we* has become *I* in the writing except for a few instances when clarification was necessary. Regardless of your age or life stage, we believe the ideas we present will resonate in your heart.

The main thing we want you to know is that it is never too late for beauty to begin in *your* life.

Section 1

*The
Beautiful
Truth*

You shall know the truth, and the truth shall
make you free.

—JOHN 8:32, NKJV

God cannot give us a happiness and peace
apart from Himself, because it is not there.
There is no such thing.

—C. S. LEWIS

The Distorted Reflection

Beauty Begins in the Heart of God

He has made everything beautiful in its time.

—ECCLESIASTES 3:11

We are so accustomed to disguise ourselves to others that in the end we become disguised to ourselves.

—FRANÇOIS DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD



Do you feel beautiful? It's a simple, straightforward question. But it may be one of the most significant, revealing questions you could ever answer.

I'm not talking about all the cliché answers to the question. I'm not interested in how you *think* you should answer the question. What I'm really asking is, "How do you feel about your reflection?" When you look in the mirror, what is the first emotion that hits you? Is it a feeling of complete contentment? Does your reflection fill you with a deep sense of peace or a deep sense of inadequacy? I mean, most of the time do you feel beautiful?

I think the majority of women, if we're completely honest, would admit that we don't feel beautiful much of the time. Recently our women's ministry team at Woodlands Church surveyed hundreds of young women and asked this question: "If you could change anything about the way you look, would you?" More than 70 percent of them answered yes and went on to name all the things they would change. We also asked, "On a scale of one to ten, how beautiful do you think you are, with one being 'I can't think of anything I like about myself' and ten being 'I am completely content.'" Only 11 percent of the girls said, "I'm completely content and at peace with my reflection."

The vast majority of young ladies who took the survey are committed Christians who are very involved in church and have great friends. I have found, however, that this struggle to feel beautiful is almost as prevalent among Christian women as it is among non-Christian women. The truth is, almost every woman battles to feel beautiful every single day. Most of us have never made peace with our reflections.

STEALING BEAUTY

Making peace with your reflection is so important, because if you fail to do that, you will declare war on yourself! Generations of women have become casualties in this war on self-worth. The battle to feel beautiful has contributed to everything

from low self-esteem and poor body image to eating disorders and self-harm.

- Ninety-one percent of women surveyed on a college campus had attempted to control their weight through dieting; 22 percent dieted “often” or “always.”¹
- Eighty-six percent of young women reported the onset of an eating disorder by age twenty; 43 percent reported the onset between the ages of sixteen and twenty.²
- Anorexia is the third most common chronic illness among adolescents.³
- Ninety-five percent of those who have eating disorders are between the ages of twelve and twenty-five.⁴
- Twenty-five percent of college-aged women engage in bingeing and purging as a weight-management technique.⁵
- The mortality rate associated with anorexia nervosa is twelve times higher than the death rate associated with all other causes of death for females fifteen to twenty-four years old.⁶

We need to wake up and realize we have a dangerous enemy who has declared war on us. Jesus tells us in the gospel of John that our enemy, Satan, has a purpose for our lives.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;
I have come that they may have life, and have it to
the full. (John 10:10)

Jesus warns us that Satan is a thief whose strategy is to steal our self-worth, kill our passion for life, and destroy our hopes and dreams.

On the other hand, Christ has come not to *steal* our self-worth but to *fill* our self-worth. Christ has come to give us “life . . . to the full,” and that means He wants us to feel full of beauty, full of joy, full of peace, and full of value and meaning!

The Bible also lets us know the first step in the Enemy’s strategy to steal our true beauty. He always starts with a lie. In the gospel of John, chapter 8, Jesus tells us that Satan is “a liar and the father of lies” (verse 44).

The world’s oldest liar gets us to forget that we were God’s idea in the first place. We don’t always remember that there is a very real God on a very real throne who calls us His beloved. The slithering enemy convinces us that our Maker’s love is never enough, never was. And Satan continually asks us to consider what others are thinking of us.⁷

—Jennifer Dukes Lee

Satan will constantly whisper destructive lies in your thoughts. They go something like this: “You’re not beautiful. You’re not valuable. You’re not worth anything.” Then he gets really specific with his lies. “You’re too fat.” “You’re too tall.” “You’re too short.” “Your hair is too dull.” “Your nose is too big.” “Your lips are too small.” “Your eyes aren’t the right color.” And the lies go on and on.

It’s all lies! If you start to believe the lies, you will base your actions and decisions on a foundation of lies and never discover your true beauty.

But Jesus tells us the truth will set us free (see John 8:32). When we begin to believe the truth of who we really are and who God made us to be, we’ll be set free to feel beautiful. Our goal in writing *Beauty Begins* is to encourage all of us to stop believing the lies and to start living the truth. To be honest, we’re tired of watching a generation of beautiful young girls and women, along with their mothers, being slowly and methodically destroyed by the lies of Satan that our culture constantly tries to force on us. So let’s start with a dose of truth about what beauty really is.

Beauty begins in the heart of God, and He placed that longing for beauty in our hearts. The problem is that our culture presents a distorted view of true beauty. When we look in the broken mirror of our culture long enough, we start to believe the distorted reflection is reality.

BEAUTIFUL VERSUS PRETTY

Would you rather be described as beautiful or pretty?

Our culture has completely confused the meaning of true beauty with the concept of pretty. There's a huge difference between beautiful and pretty. Sociologists tell us that *beauty* is defined differently, depending on the culture. I know what they are saying, but I think it's *pretty* that means different things in different cultures. Humanity's idea about what is pretty changes from culture to culture and is constantly changing within cultures.

It's eye opening to take a quick skip back through history and look at the preferred shapes for women. In the Middle Ages a woman was considered pretty if she was large and pale, and she was considered very unattractive if she was thin and tan. If a woman was heavy and pale, it meant she was part of the aristocracy and had plenty of food to eat and didn't have to work in the fields in the hot sun.

Pretty in the early nineteen hundreds was a woman who was buxom and had curvy hips. The 1920s liked a trim figure that looked good in those short flapper dresses. Like the stock market, hemlines fell in the '30s, and curvy shapes returned. This intensified in the '40s as voluptuous was the shape to welcome home war heroes. And that shape reached a zenith in the '50s. Think Marilyn Monroe.

The '60s saw the miniskirt. The '70s and '80s were just strange. The '90s presented the waif—popular but not healthy. And the early part of the twenty-first century promoted extreme exercise and dieting and a shape hard to attain.⁸

As the new millennium progresses, our culture's view of pretty will continue to change, and each change has the potential to reshape the way we see ourselves—probably not for the better.

What will the future hold for the preferred shape for women? If history tells us anything, it's that trends don't last long. Pretty is an ever-changing illusion that enslaves women and girls to fashion, diets, and gym memberships. Most of all, it keeps us in a constant state of discontent. The airbrushed, manipulated images in today's magazines leave women and girls feeling hopelessly inadequate by comparison.

Fashion, styles, and what we consider pretty constantly change. Beauty on the other hand is universal and never changes. Recently I (Chris) was driving home from the grocery store. As I rounded the corner, I was stopped in my tracks by real beauty. I had to pull the car over because I was looking at the most amazing sunset I had ever seen in my life. It was absolutely stunning with every color you can imagine—oranges and yellows, pinks, purples, and blues. It was so incredible I just sat there in awe taking it all in. Immediately I thought, *Anybody in the entire world who saw this sunset would do what I'm*

doing—watching with wonder and amazement. In any country, in any culture, at any age, any person on the planet would recognize the beauty of the sunset.

Why is that? Why in different cultures do we find different things to be pretty, and yet something about raw, wild beauty transcends our differences?

As I watched that sunset, it hit me. I saw it so clearly that for a brief moment it was as if I was no longer looking through the distorted mirror of our culture. I realized that real beauty begins with God. Therefore, something is beautiful because it has God's fingerprints all over it.

I couldn't look at the brilliantly colored canvas of that evening sky without seeing the hand of the Master Artist who painted it.

THE FINGERPRINTS OF THE MASTER ARTIST

If you walk through an art museum and see the beautiful paintings of the masters like Monet, Rembrandt, Renoir, and Michelangelo, you wouldn't think, *I guess someone spilled a bucket of paint on that canvas.* No, you would immediately recognize that it was painted by a master artist. The fingerprints of the master artist are all over it. That's what it was like when I looked at that sunset.

In all our lives there are moments when we catch a glimpse

of raw, real beauty. It's like a door that's slightly open, allowing bright light to come through. We see a little crack of light, and for a second we remember what beautiful really is.

We remember what we were created for. We remember that the One who created that sunset also created you and me. We remember that we are beautiful.

Then we forget again. We forget who created us. We forget whom we are trying to please. We forget what real beauty is.

Do you believe God sees you as beautiful? You'll begin to feel beautiful when you start believing the truth that the Master Artist beautifully created you.

Imagine a famous painter, some fiery Italian known for his impeccably high standards. Imagine the artist has been working on a particular canvas for years. The rumor around town is that this project will be his magnum opus, his great work. You know that a creative work that's worth anything demands the artist pour himself fully into the work. You consider all the planning and effort, the sleepless nights and grueling days that have gone into this special creation.

Finally one day a child runs through the streets of town shouting, "It is finished! It is finished!" Everyone heads toward the artist's house for the grand unveiling. But before the crowd gets a chance to see it, the artist steps back from the canvas to make his personal critique first. He stands there almost spell-bound, taking in every color, every brush stroke, every nuance

of shade and texture—everything. A tear comes to his eye as his mouth breaks into a smile, and he speaks aloud only two words: “*Molto bello!*” Very beautiful!

Something similar happened in Genesis when God unveiled His greatest creation. Far from a cold, distant watchmaker who turned a key and set everything in motion, God, as He is described in Genesis, is a very personal God who went to great pains to speak into existence and to fashion all that is, including us. When He was finished, He was infinitely pleased with the outcome. In fact, He was so pleased that He decided to stop. Nothing more was needed. No more tweaks or revisions.

The Master Artist created you and said, “You are beautiful, my child!”

But we’ve believed the lies of the Enemy. We’ve looked away from the mirror of God’s truth, and we’ve looked in the distorted mirror of our culture. We’ve broken away from the God who beautifully created us and loves us completely. Because we’ve broken away from God, we’ve become broken in the ugliness of our sins and failures.

THE TRUE REFLECTION

But here’s the great news! God can take even our brokenness and turn it into beauty.

That’s why real beauty begins at the Cross. God took the

ugliest event in all history and turned it into the most beautiful act in all history. On the cross Christ took our ugliest sins, mistakes, and failures and replaced them with the beauty of forgiveness, purpose, and—one day—heaven. That's where beauty begins.

Beauty begins in a love that never ends!

I want you to know that I don't have it all together. I struggle just as you do to live in the truth that I'm beautiful. As we start this journey together to make peace with our reflections, I encourage you to put this scripture on your mirror and look at it every time you see yourself. The writer of Psalm 45 directs our attention to the mirror of truth.

Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention:

Forget your people and your father's house.

Let the king be enthralled by your beauty;

honor him, for he is your lord. (verses 10–11)

I've had this verse on my mirror and on my desk for years because it reminds me that God is "enthralled" by my beauty! I like how the psalmist speaks directly to the bride: "Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention." He's saying, "Stop listening to the lies and listen to the truth! Stop looking at the distorted mirror of the culture, and look into the eyes of your King!"

The King of kings is “enthralled” by your beauty too. He is so enthralled with you that He gave up His throne in heaven to come into our broken world and win you over to Himself.

As we travel this road toward recognizing and living from our true beauty, I encourage you to spend time every day in God’s Word. At the end of each chapter is a Reflection page followed by a scripture I want you to meditate on.

As we constantly look in the mirror of truth, we’ll see our sacred reflections more clearly, and we’ll reflect the beauty of Christ to others more consistently.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for making me beautiful. I need Your help to remember that truth each day and to share it with others. The lies of the Enemy are so strong in our culture that it's easy to forget the truth of who I am. I know real beauty begins in You, and You alone. You are the Master Artist of summer sunsets and classic symphonies and Christmas snow and me. Thank You. Amen.



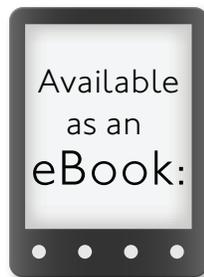
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