

Winning Your Ugly
Struggle *with* Beauty

ENOUGH



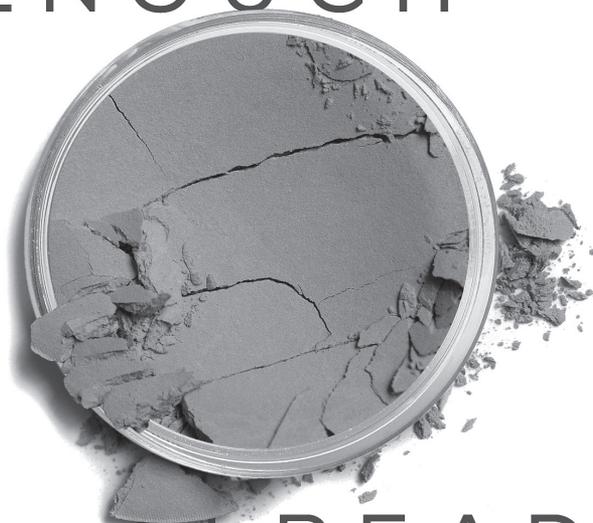
ALREADY

Barbara L. Roose

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ABINGDON PRESS
NASHVILLE

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*To all of the women who shared their beauty stories and struggles
with me. You inspired this book, and I dedicate it to you.*

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments | ix

Introduction | xi

1. Our Ugly Struggle with Beauty | 1

2. Who Told Us That We Weren't Beautiful? | 9

3. What Is Your Beauty Narrative? | 17

4. Flaw Finding | 25

5. Beauty's Goodness | 35

6. Defining "Divine Beauty" | 42

7. See God First | 51

8. What Have I Done to Myself? | 60

9. Pick Me | 67

10. The Vagina Dialogue | 76

CONTENTS

- 11. God's Paint Palette | 88
- 12. Cultivating Our Inner Beauty | 98
- 13. Stand Tall | 108
- 14. God Don't Like Ugly | 116
- 15. What We'll Give Away for Love | 128
- 16. Just Like Eyebrows, Two Are Better Than One | 142
- 17. Healing from the Inside Out | 154
- 18. If the Barn Needs Paintin' | 165
- 19. Becoming a Woman Who C.A.R.E.S. | 174
- 20. Balancing Inner and Physical Beauty | 184
- Notes | 192

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ENOUGH ALREADY

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INTRODUCTION

Give a woman a mirror and thirty seconds, and she'll tell you everything that is wrong with how she looks.

Is that statement true for you? When you look in the mirror, what do you say about your face, skin, hair, or stomach? How long does it take for you to look in a mirror and start listing all of the things about yourself that you wish you could change?

Every woman, regardless of age, struggles at some level with what she sees in the mirror. I call this our “ugly struggle with beauty.” The core of this struggle isn’t about clothing size, body shape, or fashion style. This struggle isn’t about a diet or exercise plan. Ladies, our ugly struggle with beauty is a battle over our God-given identity in a world that wants us to believe that beauty is a prize only a few women can claim.

Although we know that inner beauty trumps physical beauty, I’ve discovered that both types of beauty must interact with each other. Yes, what’s on the inside matters most, but it’s not the only thing that matters.

Enough Already addresses the origins of our ugly struggle with beauty as well as how to equip ourselves to win the battle and claim our God-given beauty. It doesn’t matter if you are single, married, or single again, there are things that you need to know about how God created you to be His expression of beauty in our world. You weren’t created

INTRODUCTION

to look in the mirror and sigh with disappointment. Even if life has tried to steal your beauty, you'll discover that what God has given you cannot be taken away. As you discover what it means to cultivate your God-given beauty, you'll mount a defense and win your ugly struggle once and for all!

This book contains lots of stories about my ugly struggle with beauty. You'll find out why Barbie dolls were the bane of my existence as well as why I almost stopped smiling. As my knowledge and experience with God has grown, I can now see how He has redeemed those difficult and painful moments in my life. I can also smile as I've been blessed by the opportunity to share my journey with you. I hope that my stories and insights give you reason to smile and know that you are beautiful just because you are created by God.

Together, we are going to take the topic of beauty from something that you try to buy for \$10.99 (with a coupon!) and reframe our understanding of it through God's eyes. We'll work to eliminate the fear that we're not skinny enough, curvy enough, or tall enough and discover that God's best is already within us. This is a journey that can heal our painful battle wounds that too many of us have sustained in this ugly struggle.

My friend, no matter where you find yourself spiritually these days, I will trust and believe that God will make His presence known to you during your journey. I pray that you will experience His presence during this journey. I also pray that God reveals the deepest origins of the ugly struggle with beauty and heals those wounded places with His love and truth.

Finally, I pray that God will send you other women—maybe even new friends—to share this experience as well. This isn't a journey that anyone should make alone.

In Jesus' name, we can do this together and discover that in God's eyes, you are enough, already!



OUR UGLY STRUGGLE WITH BEAUTY

At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness.

—Genesis 3:7

All I wanted to do that night was buy a new outfit. Instead, my department store dressing room turned into a battle zone.

I was running errands on a Wednesday night and decided to stop by Kohl's for a little retail therapy. It hadn't been a good day—you know, the kind of day when nothing seems to go right. I strolled to the front door, hoping that an hour of wandering in and out of the various clearance sections could improve my mood. Clearance prices always make me smile.

At first, the clearance-rack mojo seemed to be swinging to my beat. First, I discovered a long, swingy black sweater dress that was 70 percent off. A few racks later, I delicately fingered a lovely cream top, also on clearance. Then, my gaze fell upon a pair of black pleather pants in my size. I've never, ever tried on pleather or its genuine leather cousin, yet I heard an odd little voice in my brain whispering, "You have a gift card and a 20-percent-off coupon. Try them on."

Now, I'm 5'10", and my weight is roughly the equivalent of a skinny supermodel strapped down with a few healthy two-year-olds. I'm a

curvy girl—on the top and bottom—with long legs. All of this means that trying on pants in the best of circumstances is often an ordeal.

Then, there's the *two* servings of cheesy orzo pasta I ate for dinner.

As women, we must accept many unsavory realities about store dressing rooms. We deal with harsh lighting and big mirrors, and we pretend not to remember there is some guy in a hidden room sitting in front of dozens of monitors as cameras watch our every move. Even if dude in the camera room happens to be a creeper, he still isn't our biggest problem in the dressing room. Our biggest issue resides in the brain space between our ears.

My dressing room odysseys are hardly rational. There's something that happens when I disrobe and become vulnerable in the large mirror in front of me. The way those clothes fit suddenly becomes some type of statement about who I am. For example: If I grab a pair of jeans in my regular size, but they cling in the leg or hips, all of a sudden, I believe that my rear is too big. Conversely, if I slip into a dress that makes me feel like a rock star, I look in the mirror and the little voice in my head tells me that I am wonderful and invincible—and that I can scarf down a few extra cookies at snack time.

Unfortunately, those pleather pants fell into the first category. Sigh. *I lost again.*

Whenever I cross over the threshold into the dressing room, the battle begins. The opponents in this battle never change: ME versus ME. There's the ME in my mind pitted against the ME that I see in the mirror. Too often, it's a lopsided battle because the ME in my mind sabotages the ME in the mirror.

It's crazy and embarrassing for me to admit these things. But I comfort myself in thinking that you might be a little crazy, too.

A few years ago, I bought full-length mirrors for each of my daughters at Walmart for \$5 each. I was supposed to mount the mirrors on the wall next to their closets, but the girls decided they would rather lean the mir-

rors against the wall. I have a large, fancy mirror in my room. But I don't like my mirror. I like theirs. In fact, I've been known to finish dressing and double-check myself in their mirrors instead of mine. Why? Their mirrors make me look taller and thinner. I also feel prettier. How is that even true? I don't know, and I don't care. All I know is that when I look into the mirror, what I see has an impact on how I feel about myself.

Here's a challenge for you: find a mirror and hold it up to your face. Can you repeat the following without flinching: "I'm beautiful"? Repeat it: "I'm beautiful."

How do those words feel as they come out of your mouth? Do you feel like you are talking about yourself, or do you feel disconnected from those words? If you can't even say them, it's OK. You're not alone.

NUMBERS DON'T LIE

What is *beauty*? Dictionary.com defines *beauty* as a "quality present in a thing or person that gives intense pleasure or deep satisfaction to the mind."² Look at that definition once more. Do you realize that nowhere in the definition of *beauty* are the words *perfection* or *flawless*? Yet that seems to be what we've elevated our expectation of beauty to be. When I reflect on this definition, I understand why many women don't consider themselves beautiful. We don't find our appearance pleasurable, and when we consider our entire external person, we are far from satisfied.

Dove's 2004 Campaign for Real Beauty provided a wake-up call to women regarding to the topic of beauty. At the time, the company's survey revealed that a whopping 98 percent of women did not believe that they were beautiful. In 2011, Dove released an additional set of findings, and the percentage of women who believed they were beautiful was adjusted from 2 percent to 4 percent.¹

My degree is in English, which means my math skills are mediocre at best. Yet, I am crazy awesome at calculating store discounts. Really,

ENOUGH ALREADY

it's a gift. So, here is a shopping analogy: if Macy's had your favorite shoe or sneaker for 96 percent off, you might be tempted to act a little less than ladylike for some of that action. Although a 96-percent discount on shoes is worthy of celebration, that same 96 percent signals that we have an epic tragedy on our hands when it comes to whether or not we approve of our self-image.

Many women will admit to having beautiful eyes or a beautiful smile. We might admit that we think our legs or hair is beautiful. However, it is a rare woman who can confidently stand up to say: "My name is _____ and I'm beautiful." Who is brave enough to admit to complete beauty, not just a partial, conditional beauty? Sadly, 96 percent of us feel that we cannot do that.

Why is it so hard to stand in front of a full-length mirror and smile comfortably and confidently at what we see—and perhaps even cheer? One of my favorite parts of being a woman is that we love to shop one another's bodies. We smile and lavish compliments such as, "What a lovely shirt!" "Honey, I love those shoes!" or "Your hair looks wonderful." We love telling our girlfriends when they look beautiful. Yet, that is a graciousness that we would never extend to ourselves.

WHERE OUR UGLY STRUGGLE BEGAN

Our ugly struggle with beauty has its origins in the garden of Eden. Once upon a time, Adam and Eve were created and placed in the most perfect place on earth. God's perfect touch crafted bodies that were divinely beautiful, not based on a particular size, shape, or Photoshop skill.

Did you ever think about how Eve felt about her body? Check out Genesis and read about Eve's life in the garden of Eden. Notice that Eve experienced no angst, no disillusionment over her physical appearance. I wonder if Eve had that coveted gap between her knees. When Eve looked down at her arms, legs, breasts, and thighs, there

OUR UGLY STRUGGLE WITH BEAUTY

were no groans or sighs, only peace and contentment. Can you imagine that?

Adam and Eve enjoyed unbridled access to the beauty and perfection of the garden as well as the freedom to consume its bounty. There was only one exception: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Here are God's instructions to Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:16-17: "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

In Genesis 3, we read about a serpent who engages in a twisting, manipulative dialogue with an unwitting Eve. The serpent began with questioning Eve's knowledge of God's instructions about the *dos* and *don'ts* in the garden of Eden.

All it took for Eve to flip on God's instructions in favor of the serpent was a little pushback. The serpent appealed to Eve's pride, and that's all it took. I've always wondered why Eve seemed to fold so easily. Then again, I'm the woman whose emotional self-worth can be taken down by a pair of ill-fitting jeans.

It is in Genesis 3 that our ugly struggle with beauty begins. Eve was deceived by the serpent, and when her eyes were opened, she scampered to cover her body. When God came to visit Adam and Eve in the evening, their recognition of their naked bodies was evidence of their shame.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the word *shame* used in Genesis 3 is the same word that far too many women use to describe their current attitude toward themselves.

And where there is shame, we struggle to find beauty.

THE PAIN OF OUR STRUGGLES

There is more to life than being able to proclaim our beauty in front of the bathroom mirror. Yes, our value as women shouldn't depend on

a bathroom scale or clothing size. But let's not pretend that those things aren't important. Let's stop shooing away the topic of outer beauty like a bothersome fly at a picnic. Let's admit that how we feel about what we see in the mirror does matter. It's not the only thing that matters, but it does matter.

A few weeks before Christmas, I visited with a friend I've known for years. Her ex-husband made some plans for his life that didn't include her. This friend has courageously carved out a life as a single mother and worked to overcome the pain of her past.

As we sipped chai tea at my dining room table, my friend bravely admitted that she has never felt beautiful, and as a result, she lessened her expectations of how her husband should treat her. "I've never been beautiful. I'm not even sure I would describe myself as attractive. It's OK because I accepted that about myself when I was in high school. In fact, when my husband and I married, I was relieved because I thought he was marrying me for who I was on the inside and not because of what I looked like on the outside."³

My heart hurt for my friend as I listened to her painful story. Here is a loving, compassionate woman who did not believe that she is beautiful.

Ladies, our ugly struggle with beauty is a war on two fronts: against our culture and against ourselves. Although we cannot control the media or the messages it creates, we are 100 percent in control of our beliefs, responses, and choices when it comes to the topic of beauty. Our goal is to learn how to push back against society and self-deception.

During our journey together, we need to remember that God is the Creator of beauty, and as women, we were created to be the standard-bearers of His beauty in this world. When we see ourselves through this filter, we can fight back and triumph over our ugly struggle with beauty.

BEAUTY MARK

Where there is shame, we will struggle to find beauty.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You can use these questions in a small group format or talk about them over coffee or lunch with a friend or an accountability partner. You don't have to answer all questions; just choose the ones that are most meaningful for your group.

- 1. Are you surprised that 96 percent of women don't think they're beautiful? Are you part of the 96 percent or the 4 percent?*
- 2. How are you impacted by our culture's obsession with outer beauty?*
- 3. Are you more comfortable talking about the facets of inner beauty (virtue, strength, or integrity) or the facets of outer beauty (clothes, makeup, fashion, and so on)?*
- 4. If you completely ignore your appearance, can you list some reasons why? If you feel that you are obsessed with or spend too much time on your appearance, can you list some reasons why?*
- 5. Have you ever thought about Eve's life in the garden of Eden before being deceived by the serpent? How would your life be different if all of the concern, angst, or misery over your appearance disappeared?*

PERSONAL JOURNALING QUESTIONS

Each chapter is designed to strike deep into the tension between inner and outer beauty. While you can and should receive important feedback from others during the group discussion time, this journaling section should be between you and God. Invite Him into this portion of the experience, and use the space provided to record any reflections or impressions you are thinking or feeling.

- 1. How do you feel about yourself?*
- 2. What do you like about yourself?*
- 3. When do you feel the most secure about yourself?*
- 4. When do you feel the most insecure?*