

The Search for Lasting Beauty

A successful fashion model discusses the pitfalls of building a life on physical appearance rather than inner beauty.

By Laura Krauss Calenberg

Being on the covers of top European fashion magazines was no longer a dream for me but reality. I could hardly believe it! All I ever wanted was to be in magazines, earn lots of money, and travel all over the world. The struggle to make ends meet was finally over. Now I could wine and dine in Paris, my new home, and toast fame and fortune. After all, isn't that what life is all about?



Focus on Physical Appearance

What is your idea of beauty? What would you change about yourself if you could? When I began my career with Christian Dior in Paris at age 19, my idea of beauty was what others thought about me. If people approved of me and wanted to book me for a modeling job, then I concluded that I must be pretty. My logic was that if I was successful and working then I must be beautiful. It was a dangerous thought-pattern because I was placing my self-esteem in the hands of others and what they thought about me.

Another way that I determined beauty was by association. I was working with some of the most beautiful women in the world who were appearing in the most popular magazines. Since they were my friends and peers, then I thought, surely I'm just as beautiful.

Another way I assured myself was by the men I attracted. Since I had lots of handsome, intelligent, successful men pursuing me, I thought I was beautiful. I was popular and had a lot of friends, too. And as my success grew and people recognized me, it was very easy to get invited to all kinds of parties and go wherever I wanted. So I must be beautiful if I have all these friends and get to go to all these places.

As a result, I became an egotistical, self-centered person living a very self-centered life. Most of my time was spent on me and being concerned about

myself. "Me," "myself" and "I" were my three favorite words. My entire life was focused on my physical appearance... my weight and my hair and my clothing and my overall attractiveness.

I once was on a two-month modeling job in Japan. Every day people were assigned to do everything for me, even tie my shoes. When I got dressed, there was someone to hold my dress and coat. They had three people to do one person's job. It all fed my self-centeredness and feeling of self-importance.

Pitfalls of Physical Appearance

I also became a workaholic. I worked seven days a week because I knew nothing was guaranteed -- I could be out of work the next day. My looks could be gone anytime, so I had to take every job. I would work in Germany during the day and then fly to Paris in the evening to work and then go back to Germany in the morning. I was afraid of losing it all and had to hold on to it at any cost. So I would take any and every job I could.

The result was that I became exhausted and sick. I fainted one day in the middle of a shoot and injured my knee. I was laid up in bed for the first time in my career. Not being able to work was the most frightening experience I'd ever had, because even if it was for only two weeks it meant I was missing all the pret-a-porter (fashion shows) that I'd just been fitted for. I had to cancel fourteen shows. I was crushed.

But one day as I lay there bedridden and unable to work, I began to reflect on my life and question my values and ideas about beauty and what kind of person I had become within.

I realized that my views of beauty were inadequate. I knew for example, that my looks were going to change. My covers and my "tear sheets" (my pictures that I tear out of magazines) became out-of-date very quickly. I had worked so hard to get those photos in magazines and my agency wanted to take them out of my portfolio within six months because everything was out of style! I was constantly trying to keep up.



I also discovered that making a lot of money at a young age was great, but I found that the responsibility of managing it was overwhelming. It also made me question why people were really attracted to me. If I looked different or did something different or had less money, would my boyfriend still love me for who I am?

All these questions and doubts were hitting me when I was still at the peak of my career. I realized the shallowness of it all and began to feel very empty inside. After acquiring all I thought I wanted, I realized something was still missing. All the success and attention I received didn't fill the emptiness I felt deep within.

What had happened? Where were my priorities? Who or what was I living for?

Insecurity of Physical Appearance

It occurred to me that I had been building my life on things that weren't secure. It was built on what the culture thought or my boyfriend thought or how much money I made or how popular I was. I realized I was building my life on sand.

I reflected back to a time in Indiana where I grew up when a significant event had taken place in my life. "Searching for love in all the wrong places," as the song goes, actually did me some good when a classmate invited me to a concert at her church. I accepted because half of the teen group were boys, and the church was very large, so I knew this could be fun.



But I had believed there was no need for God in my life. What was the point? My parents were in the midst of a divorce. Their faith wasn't helping them.

But, while at the concert, in addition to the music, I heard a message that touched me. At the close of the concert the musicians told us they had some good news to share. I thought they were going to tell us about their first record deal or something. But the news they were talking about turned out to be that God loves us.

They talked about a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. They described how God loved me unconditionally and that because of that He sent His only Son to die on the cross for my sins. Wow, I thought, an unconditional love relationship! I had no trouble admitting that I had done wrong things in my life, that I hadn't measured up to what God wanted me to be. The musicians explained that I didn't have to earn God's favor. I could just receive God's gift of love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

That night I prayed a short prayer asking Christ to forgive me and change me. I told Him that I would live for Him and serve Him with my life. I invited Him to come into my life to begin a relationship with me.

So there I sat in Paris years later, reflecting on that special event, wondering how I got to such a point in my life where life had lost its true meaning. I realized that I had neglected my relationship with God and chosen my own direction. No wonder I felt so empty! So, I asked God to forgive me for living for myself and the approval of others. And I said to Him: "Please change me and show me what real beauty is."

The first thing that God showed me was the danger of vanity. I had struggled with that for a long time. In America, \$20 billion is spent annually on cosmetics; \$300 million on cosmetic surgery; \$33 billion on dietary products. This illustrates how much time and money we spend on our physical appearance. Vanity is not beautiful.

Related to that was my habit of comparing myself with the looks of other women. Jealousy is another problem I've had to work on. I've had to learn to be secure in who and what I am and how God has made me, knowing that He loves me no matter what I look like or how I act.

Insecurity is not beautiful. It makes it difficult to have and be a friend. And you put a lot of expectations on others to compliment you and make you feel good.

Definition of Beauty - True Beauty

What is beauty? It is not physical appearance. It's what's found inside, what's in your heart. Humility is beautiful, although it's not popular in my business. Security and self-esteem are beautiful. And knowing God personally brings beauty, because knowing He loves you and accepts you brings security and self-esteem to your life. That enables you to be free to accept and love yourself and your shortcomings.

Without Christ's forgiveness, our sin makes us ugly on the inside. We're not at peace. All the "cover-up" remedies in the world can't change that. God sees it and others will see it too. Only Christ can make us beautiful in God's sight. True inner beauty begins with God at the center of our lives and grows outward.

I can tell you that Jesus Christ has changed my life, and I will never regret the decision I made to follow Him. Why not ask Christ to come into your life? Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to him" (Revelation 3:20).

You can receive Christ right now by faith through prayer. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. Here is a prayer like the one I prayed that might express the desire of your heart...

Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life and make me the person You want me to be.

If this prayer expresses the desire of your heart, you can pray this prayer now and Christ will come into your life, as He promised.

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Laura Calenberg is a New York City fashion model. She has traveled to 22 countries in her work as a model and has appeared on the covers of numerous magazines, including Marie Claire, Cosmopolitan and Brio. She has appeared in many ads for Saks, Nieman Marcus and Hanes. She is married to Jeff Calenberg, who is also a professional model, and has two wonderful children.

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