
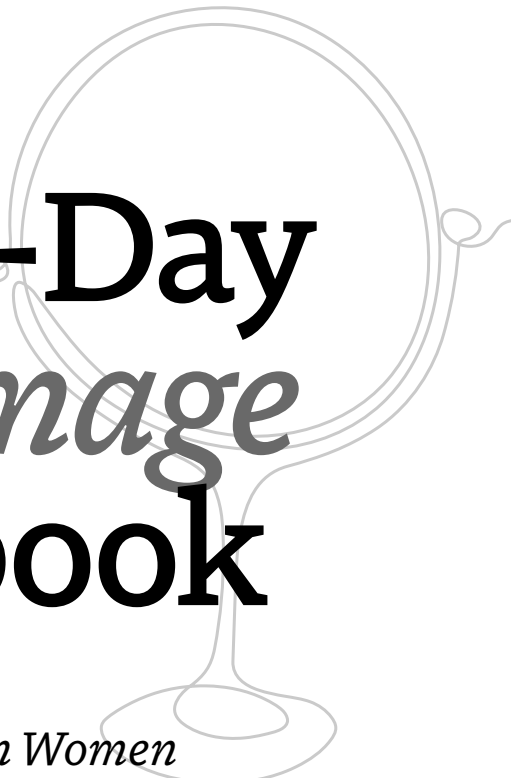


*Hope for
Christian Women
Who've Tried
Everything*

The
40-Day
*Body
Image*
Workbook



Heather Creekmore



The 40-Day *Body Image* Workbook

*Hope for Christian Women
Who've Tried Everything*

Heather Creekmore



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*To every woman who's ever
ordered a salad when she really craved a burger;
watched an infomercial, made the payments, and hoped for a miracle;
bought an overpriced bottle of product that made her hair worse; or
believed that pounds, inches, or skin elasticity defined her worth.*

You are seen, you are valuable, and you are loved.

This book is for you.

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To the One Who's Tried Everything

I have no idea how I ended up with type B blood because every ounce of my personality is type A. Give me a plan; I'll work it. Give me a goal; I'll try to reach it. This is the book I never wanted to need. Certainly, with enough effort, an overachiever like me could find her way out of body image issues.

But no amount of planning or striving ever led me to a place where the scale and mirror sang, "You are so beautiful." One look at my thighs, and the only thing I heard was the *Mission: Impossible* theme.

Maybe you feel the same right now. Perhaps frustration furrows through your mind. It doesn't seem fair that you're still trying to make peace with your body after all you've done. Why won't God just zap this all away? Why does *this* have to make the to-do list?

If you're like me, maybe you had a grand plan to shrink your body image issues into oblivion. As soon as you found the "right" diet or exercise program that fit your life, you'd watch your concerns magically disappear.

Or perhaps you thought you'd age out of your body image issues. Did you believe that by the time you were twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, or older, you'd feel so settled in your skin that you could blow those body image issues away like the flickering candles on your cake? *I sure did.*

I see you if you've logged hundreds of prayers asking God to take this away from you. I know you if you looked at the before-and-afters, bought the plan, and felt hopeless when the results didn't follow. I hear you when you say that you've literally "tried everything" but nothing seems to make a difference. You still don't like the way you look.

I've been there.

Of course, decades ago, I would have told you my problem was with my body, not my body image. I was sure that all the negative feelings about my appearance would resolve if I just changed how I looked. Obsessive thoughts would cease. My disordered relationship with food and exercise would vanish. As soon as I found the right formula to fix it all, my body image would transform.

But the ducks never lined up, at least not in a way that freed me spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally from my body image struggle. Instead, those thoughts of my inadequacies quacked daily, hourly, and sometimes every minute. They plagued me even when I finally wore the size I'd always hoped to wear.

God has done a makeover on my heart. Though my teen daughter is the only one who can fit into my old sizes, today I'm free in a way I never thought I could be. It's been almost a decade since I wrote my first book, *Compared to Who?*, which chronicles how God led me out of body image bondage. That book, my blog, and my podcast have offered me the opportunity to coach other women who, like me, have fought a nonstop battle with the number on the scale or their reflection in the mirror.

Many of my clients had read other body image books. They knew that God and *Vogue* have different definitions of beauty, but they were still stuck. Why couldn't they just break free? Working with each woman for six weeks, I gave them homework: reading and journaling assignments. The work wasn't always easy, but over time, they felt a sense of freedom they'd never before experienced.

Freedom. That sounds nice, doesn't it? Can you imagine what life would be like if you didn't have to obsess over every calorie? What if the words "Let's take a picture!" no longer made you want to go hide in the bathroom? How would it feel to confidently wear shorts in the summer or a swimsuit at the beach? What would it be like to see your reflection in the mirror and not spiral into negative thoughts?

Maybe you doubt this kind of freedom is actually possible. Perhaps you've ridden up the escalator of hope so many times, you can't bear the thought of another letdown. Through the pages that follow, I offer encouragement so that

- you can know and feel like you are loved beyond what you measure.
- you can be free from the judgment of the scale and the dressing room mirrors.
- you can experience the freedom of entering a room without fearing what others think of your body.

And trust me, friend: When this change happens on the inside, you radiate a type of beauty that Photoshop and touch-up filters can't match.

Diets and body “makeover” plans promise that we'll get their results if we follow their rules. But body image freedom isn't about getting the rules right. The freedom to accept, appreciate, and make peace with your body doesn't come from a perfectly executed plan. It comes from determining to walk a new path.

One client of mine, Amanda, has been on this path for over a year now. We followed a course similar to the one laid out in this book as we worked together. Today, she texted me this:

I can't even count how many times I've said to my husband, “I'm so happy now.” I'm seriously a different person. Even my twelve-year-old commented on how different and relaxed I've been lately—and she doesn't even know what I've been working to change. I knew I was struggling. I knew I was obsessed and consumed. But I didn't know how much bondage I was in until I got free.

I invite you to read and work through these biblical concepts I've used with hundreds of coaching clients. There are questions to help you process, exercises to apply what you're learning, and Scripture verses to help you hear God's heart in your struggle and to keep you close to the only one who can truly help you change. You may choose to slow down as you work through the content. Some concepts may trigger thoughts that will take a few days or more to process. You may want to read through the entire book first and then go back to the beginning and do the exercises. There's no time pressure. Just keep working on it regularly, and you will make progress.

You'll find questions strategically placed throughout each chapter, but you'll also find special “Work It Out” and “Act” sections. “Work It Out” is designed to help you actively process what you've read, while “Act” offers bonus activities for those ready to take the content and concepts to the next level of application.

Many books are dedicated to making sure you feel good about yourself. But feeling good about yourself is a temporary condition that's subject to change—sometimes hourly. The type of transformative journey in this book is designed to last. That's why we go deep. Afterwards, you may even feel empowered to invite other women out of their bondage and into freedom with you.

We have so much more to offer the world than our ability to shrink or transform our bodies. God created us on purpose and for a purpose. I know that's hard to believe in our image-focused culture.

Today, I invite you on a journey to see your body image issues in a completely new way. Healing your body image is vital to your physical, mental, and spiritual health. We'll explore how to reset your programming about food and your appearance, and why you care so much about them both. Will you join me?

Start by taking the following quiz. Then, when you're finished with the book, read and sign the Certificate of Commitment on page 221 to treat yourself with grace as you walk a new path to body image freedom. I can't wait to see how God begins to set you free.

Body Image Quiz

1. On an average day, I think about the way I look . . .
 - a. Multiple times a day.
 - b. What is an average day? Some days I plan out my next diet all day long, but other days I don't worry about it.
 - c. Occasionally. But seeing that woman on a billboard or on TV really does make me think about my flaws. . . .
 - d. Rarely. I'm a wash-and-go girl. I don't know what I weigh or what my hair looks like right now.
2. When I think about my body, my first thought is . . .
 - a. Gross. I hope no one ever has to see this unclothed with the lights on.
 - b. If I could just change this, and this, and this, then I would smile in the mirror.
 - c. Some days I'm gorgeous. Some days I'm not.
 - d. I can't wait for swimsuit season.
 - e. I am who I am. This body is temporary.

3. The last time I went on a diet or an “eating plan” was . . .
 - a. Monday. In fact, I’m on one right now.
 - b. I try new eating plans whenever I hear about them, but I wouldn’t call it “dieting.”
 - c. Can’t remember, but I’ve tried many over the years.
 - d. I eat what I want to eat and don’t stress over food.
 - e. What is a diet?
4. If I were completely honest, I’d have to say that I exercise because . . .
 - a. I want to change something about my body.
 - b. I have to burn up some calories.
 - c. I want to look better.
 - d. It’s a great stress-reliever.
 - e. Define *exercise*. I move my body because it makes me feel good.
5. When I hear, “It’s what’s on the inside that counts,” I think . . .
 - a. That’s nice, but it doesn’t apply to me.
 - b. Whatever. That may be true, but I still need to look good on the outside too.
 - c. I know deep down this is true. But I still have a hard time believing it (or acting like it’s true) most days.
 - d. Encouraged. Yes. God loves me. Every time I hear it, I feel freed from thinking about my body.
6. This is how much time I spend thinking about food each day . . .
 - a. All. Day. Long.
 - b. I carefully calculate my macros and/or calories.
 - c. Some days I’m consumed. Some days I don’t remember what I ate for lunch.
 - d. I forget to eat sometimes.
 - e. I have no clue. Do people really think about food? That’s a thing?
7. When I think about swimsuit season, I think . . .
 - a. Ugh. Why does summer come every year? Can I wear yoga pants to a pool party? I loathe swimwear.
 - b. Okay, it’s three months away, so I will workout every day and eat salads for dinner, and I’ll be ready.
 - c. I’m ready, I just need to find a good tummy-controlling swimsuit.
 - d. Woo hoo! Who’s hosting the pool party?
 - e. I don’t really give it too much thought.

8. Have you ever had this thought: *If I could just lose (or gain) _____ pounds, then I would be happy?*
 - a. Hourly.
 - b. Daily.
 - c. Only when I'm trying on clothes.
 - d. My weight isn't something I think about.
9. I'd really like for other people to see me as physically beautiful.
 - a. True. This is important to me.
 - b. True. I wish this wasn't important, but it is.
 - c. True sometimes, but only when I put in the effort to look nice.
 - d. False. Who cares? It's what's on the inside that counts.
10. If other people compliment my appearance, I feel . . .
 - a. Indifferent. They're just being nice (or lying).
 - b. Anxious. If people don't say anything about my appearance, I wonder if I look bad.
 - c. Good. It helps to know that other people think I look good.
 - d. I don't really care what others think of my appearance.
 - e. Great! I say "Thank you!" and smile for the rest of the day.
11. How do you feel when you see images of so-called "perfect" women?
 - a. Imperfect.
 - b. They make me feel like I'm not enough.
 - c. I try to remind myself that they're airbrushed, but I still wish I looked more like that.
 - d. It doesn't faze me. It's what's on the inside that counts, right?
 - e. Indifferent. We are all unique.
12. Bad hair days, pimples, bloating, or the number on the scale will affect my day in this way:
 - a. I'll feel lousy all day. Confidence gone.
 - b. Another day I have to be devoted to finding new skincare, a new hairdresser, or a new diet.
 - c. I'll do occasional mirror check-ins on my flaws, but the day isn't ruined.
 - d. Why let a little issue like that ruin a perfectly good day?
13. Inside my head, I hear . . .
 - a. Constant criticism and judgment: *You are too fat, too ugly. Why did you eat that?*
 - b. Lies: *No one loves you. They think you're ugly. You have no value.*

- c. A mixture of thoughts. Some days I fight lies, criticism, and judgment. Other days I feel confident.
 - d. I'm not sure.
 - e. Affirmation: *I am made in God's image. I am loved.*
14. I've thought this: *If I could just be more like her, then I would be happy . . .*
- a. Hourly. It would feel great to have a body that's more like hers.
 - b. Daily. Every time I look in a mirror.
 - c. Sometimes, but I try to push that thought down and remind myself of the truth.
 - d. I've never thought that.
15. I really wish there was a way for me to stop worrying about what I look like and stop obsessing over my appearance.
- a. True. And I know that this will happen when I lose weight and get my body the way I want it.
 - b. True. And I wonder if there is some spiritual root of this issue I just haven't figured out yet.
 - c. True, but I'm trying to work on a more positive mindset regarding my body image and mental health.
 - d. True and false. It depends on what day you catch me!
 - e. False. I don't really spend time stressing about this.

Scoring:

Count and write down the totals of each answer below.

A: _____

B: _____

C: _____

D: _____

E: _____

For every answer of A or B: give yourself 5 points

For every answer of C: give yourself 3 points

For every answer of D or E: give yourself 1 point

My Score: _____

50 points or more: Body Image Is a Beast

You're battling the body image beast! Some days it feels like you are in the fight for your life as you try not to be consumed by the pressures to lose weight or change your appearance. You may be battling a full-blown eating disorder, or you may just have an anthem of negative thoughts and lies about your appearance and worth charging through your head most of the day. The enemy lies to you a lot. He tells you that you aren't worthy or you need to look different in order to be worthy of love. You need help battling these lies and uncovering why they keep you stuck. You worry that your negative feelings about your body will never change. For best results, tell someone that you're working through this book, and ask them to keep you accountable. Hopelessness and despair are two of the enemy's best tricks to keep us from making progress. Include a friend or family member who can encourage you to keep working at it. Don't be afraid to seek additional help from a Christian counselor or therapist as you work through thoughts or memories that are difficult or painful.

30–49 points: Body Image Is a Bother

You aren't overly obsessed with changing the way you look, but every once in a while, body image bogs you down. Like an annoying mosquito, the enemy whispers in your ear that you need to change. You get hung up on trying to eliminate cellulite, change the number on the scale, erase the wrinkles, or flatten those abs. Body image feels like a roller-coaster ride. Some days you cruise without care, and other days you feel like screaming. You long to find consistency and reach a place where you can feel at peace with your body. This workbook should offer great support for your journey and help you uncover why certain triggers impact your body image more than others.

29 points or fewer: You Keep Body Image Issues at Bay

You're doing a great job making peace with your body and not stressing much over your body image. But body image issues can build over time. Use this book as a guide to help you continue to work through those body image flare-ups that may trigger behaviors or thought patterns that could lead to a bigger struggle with body image issues in the future.



Week 1

Body Image Basics

Day 1

You're Like Abraham

Get ready for a journey to a foreign land of body acceptance

Your heart, mind, hands, and feet are stamped with the imprint of the Creator. Little wonder that the Devil wants you to be ashamed of your body.

Joni Eareckson Tada

I bet you didn't expect a body image book to start by comparing you to one of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. Granted, there aren't an abundance of similarities. But trust me, friend. Your journey to body image freedom and Abraham's adventure to a new land may be more similar than you think.

In Genesis 12, the Lord tells one of the most famous men in the Bible to leave everything familiar. He promises to bless Abraham and bring blessing to future generations if Abraham will follow the Lord's lead out of Haran. Notice that God doesn't tell him an exact address to pop into his phone's navigation system. Instead, he calls him to "the land I will show you" (v. 1).

For most of us, the journey to seeing our bodies biblically is a venture into unknown territory. You look at the woods and wonder if there's really a trail through those trees.

The land I will show you? Yikes! I would've asked God for more information before loading my bags on the camel. I like to know where I'm going, when I'm going, and how I'll get there. Oh, and I'll pack snacks and a bottle of water. I never leave home without a full water bottle.

Yet, implicit in God's command to Abraham is a call to trust. Verse 4 tells us, "So Abram went, as the LORD had told him." Perhaps we're supposed to learn from his quick obedience. **Can we trust God to lead us to a place—mentally, physically, and spiritually—where we are at peace with our bodies?**

Changing the Programming

I said the sinner's prayer before I could tie my shoes. I've been following Jesus for most of my life. Christian schools, a Christian college, even a Christian graduate school characterized my education. I knew the gospel and all about Jesus's sacrifice for me. But trusting God hasn't always been easy—especially in the arena of my body. **I could surrender my heart but not my dress size.**

Now I work with women who face a similar battle with their body image. They're tired of stressing over food and letting the scale dictate their mood. They want to be free, but their brains are on autopilot. They don't know how to think about or see their bodies in any other way.

And I get it. You can't just flip a switch and fix your body image issues overnight. These patterns of thinking and believing weren't developed in a day, so they'll take some time to change. But change is possible. I know it is. I've experienced it.

A Foreign Land

Whether you've been battling your body image for a week or a lifetime, the days ahead may feel like a journey to a foreign land. Seeing our bodies through the lens of the gospel stands antithetical to almost everything in our culture. A woman who isn't always trying to lose weight, obsessed with her size, fretting over body parts, wrinkles, or hair? That woman is going to stand out from the crowd.

She's an enigma.

She's countercultural.

She may not get thousands of Instagram likes.

I confess. I've been on a decade-long quest to try to be more like that kind of woman. It's still a challenge some days. Stand with any group of women around a dessert table, and you'll only have to wait a few minutes before someone comments about the calories in the cookies. Go out to dinner with a group of gals, and I can almost promise someone will use the words "I'm being good" in the

context of the food they order. Diet culture language combined with the over-emphasis on physical appearance has turned many of us into food apologists. We empathetically nod along when someone quips, “Those go straight to my hips” or “I’ll go to the gym and work it off later.”

If you’re like me, this is a familiar land where you Google the trendiest diets and workouts so you can speak the dialect with ease. If Whitney from work is cutting carbs, you try it too. **We all chase the same dream, sharing our tips and tricks along the way. In our culture, this is how women relate to one another.**

I barely passed economics—it was a video course, and the instructor was dreadfully dull. Alas, the economy of our native land is straightforward: Weight loss = praise. Success stories revolve around someone ruthlessly shedding pounds to get “healthy.” A high value is placed on your ability to appear as if you have it all together. Look good, and you’ll get good. Look better, and there’s no limit to the joy life will bring. *Sigh. So much pressure!*

A Different Way

This feels a little different from how God’s kingdom works. Okay, maybe a lot different. God doesn’t define success, beauty, or health the same way we do. Likewise, any journey toward having a more biblical view of body image may feel like boarding a spaceship to Mars. When you’re the only one *not* on a new diet, *not* making negative comments about your body, or *not* uber-focused on what you’re wearing, you feel like an alien.

Isn’t that a bundle of encouragement?

Oh, friend! Freedom is worth it. I know the joy, peace, and rest found in trusting God and choosing the alternate path. **Obsessing over our bodies has made us anxious, stressed, and depressed. There’s another way!**

It’s not always easy. Culture touts body transformation as the gateway to all joy. Like dog hair on your black pants, brushing culture’s claims fully off is practically impossible. Yet, like Abraham, it’s time to enter a new land, turn in a new direction, and leave the old behind. Chances are you’ve tried the plans. You’ve bought the diet foods, crunched your way through eight-minute abs, or read copious articles on losing weight for life. This is an invitation to try a new way—to approach your body image struggles as matters of the heart, not the body.

The best news is this: You're not alone on this journey. God is for you. No matter what you've walked through—be it a full-blown eating disorder; frustration with your height, your skin, or your hair; or decades of yo-yo diets—you've not disappointed God. His grace will cover you as you walk through this wilderness. Will you accept his invitation to journey to a new view of you?

Work It Out

Write about your body image journey so far. Are there areas where you've been stuck for a long time? Use any of the applicable prompts below to help.

Here's what I've wished I could change about my body . . .

No one knows this about my body image struggle . . .

Read Genesis 12:1–3 and Galatians 5:1. Has your body image struggle become so familiar that not having it would feel foreign?

Galatians 5:1 talks about the “yoke of slavery.” Has body change ever felt like bondage to you? How so?

What would body image freedom mean for you?

My Goals

Are there specific habits or patterns in your life that you would like to break through on this journey? Here are some examples:

- I'd like to feel okay wearing shorts in the summer.
- I want to stop yo-yo dieting.
- I'd like to feel confident enough to not have to change clothes multiple times before leaving the house.

Goal 1: _____

Goal 2: _____

Day 2

You're Like Sarah

It takes faith to believe God can fix this

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us . . .

Ephesians 3:20 ESV

Now that you've established some goals for your journey, let's look at how the path ahead may differ from others you've traveled.

You see, I tried just about anything to change my body. I'm the reason infomercials work. When it comes to a supplement that will zap me skinny, my faith is fierce. Sure, there's cynicism too. I argue, *Won't this fail like all the others?* But my faith wins. If there's even a slight chance this could be the miracle that solves all my food and body issues, why risk missing out?

I've spent countless dollars on exercise gizmos, downloadable food plans, and make-me-slender supplements. Sometimes my confidence helps them work for a week or two. (*Likely the placebo effect.*) I swallow the first pill and instantly feel my stomach shrink. But imaginary results eventually wane. I give up. Defeated. Once again, my purchase let me down. Has this ever happened to you?

The book of Hebrews lauds Abraham as a man of great faith in God. Like we talked about yesterday, he picked up and left his homeland without so much as the name of his destination.

But Abraham's faith wasn't perfect. Yes, he exudes trust as he sets out on the journey to a mysterious promised land, but let's pick up the story a little

later when his faith was challenged. God made Abraham a promise—he'd be the father of many. Yet Sarah, his wife, was infertile. At seventy-six years old, she gave up and told old Abe to sleep with her maid, Hagar.

Let me repeat that. *She gave up at seventy-six!*

Hagar has a son for Abraham, but the Lord tells Abe that Ishmael isn't the one he's been waiting for. After a heavenly visit where God's promise was repeated, Sarah becomes pregnant and births a baby boy. As a reminder of Sarah's response to how preposterously amazing this act of God was, the couple named the baby Isaac, meaning laughter. In Genesis 21:6, Sarah says that "everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." In Genesis 21:1, the Bible tells us that the Lord was "gracious" to Sarah, and he did what he promised. His grace poured out on her, even though she had trouble believing.

So, back to your body image. How's your faith? **Do you believe that God can actually change this area of your life?** I ask the women I coach what their number one hesitancy is about working together. The most common response is, "I'm afraid it won't work. Nothing else has!" *Maybe you even had that thought when you bought this book!*

Tried All the Things

Perhaps like me, you've tried all the things. Some worked for a season; some never worked. You've tried fitness plans and diets. You've tried surgeries or undergarments that make it look like you've had surgery. Powders, pills, creams, injections, and supplements. *Check.* You've looked in the mirror and told yourself you're pretty. You've dutifully written lists of what you "appreciate" about your body. Yet the Ferris wheel never lets us off the ride. Our heads won't stop spinning. **We hope a few body tweaks will settle our worth and stop the cycle altogether. But deep down, we all wonder, *Will I ever be free?***

Can you relate? List any aspects of your struggle that you feel will never change:

On a scale of 1 to 10, how important of a goal has body improvement become in your life?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not important Somewhat important Very important

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident are you that God can heal your body image issues?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not confident Somewhat confident Very confident

Fighting Disappointment

Our body image journey can feel like one long string of letdowns. We're disappointed that the plan didn't work (or the results didn't last). Maybe we're frustrated with how much we've been working out or spending on skincare products, yet we still don't like the way we look. The struggle could be with aging. None of the turn-back-the-clock potions rewind time well enough.

Maybe it's deeper than that. Maybe you just feel depressed that this is the body God gave you, and you wrestle a twinge of resentment. How is it fair that "this" is the body he chose for you?

Circle the types of disappointment that resonate the most with you today:

I'm disappointed by fitness/nutrition plans that didn't work.

I'm frustrated I've wasted money on plans that didn't work.

I'm disappointed that results from previous plans/efforts didn't last.

I'm frustrated I've wasted time and my body image still isn't better.

I'm disappointed that this is the body God chose for me.

I'm frustrated that God didn't make me look different.

I'm disappointed that I can't stop the effects of aging.

Where Have We Placed Our Faith?

I can relate to every one of the feelings on the list. But let's go back to square one. There's only one kind of hope that does not disappoint. As Romans 5:5 reminds us, that's the hope placed in the one who could never disappoint: Jesus. When I put my faith in counting points or riding a fancy exercise bike, it's misplaced hope. These body transformation tools may change my physical being, but they won't touch the places where my body image needs the most healing—in my heart and in my mind.

Read Genesis 18:14 and Genesis 21:1. Genesis 18:14 asks, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" How does Sarah's story inspire you to believe that God can do a miracle in this area of your life?

Work It Out

Write a letter to God about the disappointment you've felt over your body.

Dear God,

Day 3

You're Valuable

Understanding the economics of worth

Your worth is not determined by the opinions of God's other creations.

Heather Creekmore

A few decades ago, I was worth about twenty camels. Yes, I mean the tall desert animals with the humps. Despite inflation, I'm not sure if I'd be worth that many now. *Aging is real.*

I was on a trip to Israel for a class. It was my first real out-of-the-country experience (aside from that hour I spent in Tijuana just to say I'd been to Mexico). After visiting a holy shrine, we crossed paths with an Arab man. One of my classmates, Dan, engaged him in cordial conversation, but soon I heard our new Arab friend say, "I'll give you twenty camels for the blond girl."

Dan laughed and said it was a tempting offer, but he didn't think he could get the camels in his carry-on. *Thanks, Dan.*

Later we asked a local to explain. Trading camels for a young woman was a standard transaction. At the time, a camel was worth two to three thousand U.S. dollars. That meant my value to this man settled somewhere in the ballpark of \$50,000.

Wearing a price tag feels odd and uncomfortable. It conjures disturbing and disgusting images of slave trade and trafficking. To put a monetary value on any human life is to miss the heart of God. Our value is immeasurable. But I wonder if this same immeasurability is what makes it so difficult for us to comprehend our value.

Worth Seven Years' Wages

Remember Sarah and Abraham? Their son, Isaac, found a wife of his own, and the couple welcomed twin boys: Jacob and Esau. There's interesting family drama here, but eventually Jacob grows up and leaves home to find a wife. He quickly falls lovestruck for a girl named Rachel. So enamored, he offers to work for her father for seven full years to pay for her. *I guess that's not too different from the camel arrangement.*

Jacob was like a preschooler with a new iPad. Seven years went by, and Scripture tells us it felt just like a day to him. With his debt worked off, it was finally time for him to receive his prize—the beautiful Rachel. But then something downright tragic happens. Laban, Rachel's father, decides to do a little bait and switch. Instead of giving Rachel to Jacob at the wedding, Laban subs in her older (and less attractive) sister, Leah. Leah and Jacob spend the night together, and it's only the next morning when Jacob realizes he's been duped.

We'll explore more of this story later, but I feel heartsick for poor Leah. I wonder what she felt like she was worth. Rachel, her younger sister, was worth seven years' wages, but Dad didn't think he'd get anything for Leah, so he threw Leah at Jacob like the bonus donut that comes in the baker's dozen.

Am I Valuable?

At some level, we all question our value. Sadly, part of me felt affirmed by the camel proposition. My boyfriend moved across the country, then decided that long-distance relationships weren't for him. Combine that with my body image issues, and I felt unwanted. The offer of \$50,000 made me feel a pinprick of worthiness. Still, I secretly wondered if the offer would have been higher if I were prettier.

If the question of your value has ever echoed through your heart, then let's take a fresh look at where our worth comes from. **The very premise that we were created in God's image has been undermined by culture for decades. Is this why we struggle to believe we're valuable?**

No Creator, No Value

When my son was in kindergarten, he brought home little books that wove this message into each story: "Remember when that big explosion created the

world . . .” Each time we read it, we tried to re-teach him. “No, Zach, this isn’t true. God made the universe, and each of us too.” As parents, we knew our assignment was bigger than getting him through his homework.

While what children learn about the universe’s origin may seem trivial to your body image issues, stay with me here. The confusion over our creation has a more significant impact than we see. According to the “Millennials in America” study, Dr. George Barna explains the damaging impact of a whole generation that never learned they were created on purpose. It’s easy to feel like an off-brand bargain when you don’t know you were divinely designed.

Barna believes that seeing ourselves as happy accidents tremendously impacts the mental health crisis this generation faces. He explains the harm that can come from not believing in the presence of an omnipotent and loving Creator:

Without any anchors for truth, emotions, decision-making, relational boundaries, or purpose, a sense of anomie and disconnectedness is only natural.¹

What connections do you see between understanding how God created us and knowing our worth?

Did you grow up learning that you were intrinsically valuable because God created you? If so, jot down some of the lessons you learned and who shared them. Or, can you remember if or when you heard this message in adulthood?

How does this truth make you feel?

1. George Barna, “Millennials in America: New Insights into the Generation of Growing Influence,” Foundations of Freedom, October 2021, <https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/George-Barna-Millennial-Report-2021-FINAL-Web.pdf>.

The Economics of Value

It only takes a few minutes of scrolling Instagram to figure out what culture values. Success stories revolve around the person who can accomplish the biggest transformation in their body shape, bank account, or number of followers. Wisdom, integrity, and faithfulness are no longer tradable commodities. Beauty, wealth, and celebrity are the Park Place and Boardwalk on our culture's Monopoly board.

We've become so untethered from the foundations of where our true worth is derived that we flounder. Our souls can't know their worth apart from Jesus. **You can wear the size, have the look and the flawless skin—but until you know you're valuable inside, you'll never feel valuable on the outside.**

In the Christmas carol "O Holy Night," there's one line that always strikes me: "He appeared and the soul felt its worth." Jesus completes the puzzle. He's the answer to every economic problem our hearts face. Only he can fill that hole in our soul.

What are you worth? You're worth what someone is willing to pay for you. And I have tremendous news. Jesus paid it all.

Work It Out

Have you ever struggled to believe you were valuable or "worthy"? Write about it here.

What have you observed from culture's lessons about what makes a person valuable?

If God were to respond directly to the messages you hear about not having value or worth, what do you think he would say?

Read Genesis 29:15–30. How did you feel as you read Jacob and Rachel’s love story? What attributes beyond physical beauty do you ascribe to Rachel? What attributes do you ascribe to Leah?

Read Leah’s response in Genesis 29:35. After you’ve completed this workbook, what would have to happen for you to be able to say, “This time I will praise the LORD”?

How would it feel to experience this kind of contentment in life and in your body image?