

Women: Stewarding our Body Image

For most females, the discussion of body image is not necessarily a pleasant one. Culture seems to scream at us to change, conform, lose, or try something and the ongoing messaging of “if-only” is very real. The magazines and billboards of yesteryear have now given rise to the social threads that keep our attention reel after reel defining for us what success and happiness with our body image should look like. And this is not just for youth. If honest, all ages of women are affected by this “heart-check” of how we each view our bodies and what this means as we are to live in Christ. As females then, how can we measure up? How can we view ourselves in a positive way regarding our shape, our weight, our sexuality, and in essence, our image?

The Bible has much to say regarding our body image and what it should and should not be. After all, we are image bearers of God (*Genesis 1:27*)—created to model, honor and be like God from the very start of Scriptures. How we view ourselves in his image will be reflected in how we steward our body. Whether females find themselves single, married, young, or aging, the care we give to our physical bodies has an impact on our spiritual relationship with our Creator, our emotional health, and our relational well-being. Understanding unhealthy patterns which females can fall into as well as considering how we steward our body are both important facets for the female believer.

Patterns of Struggle with Body Image

How we navigate our body image is greatly affected by what we pay attention to (*1 Corinthians 6:19*). Most females can easily find something they would change about their physical appearance. Ask the average female what they appreciate about their physical appearance, and it takes a minute. We know the “right answers” (i.e., we are “*fearfully and wonderfully made*,” “*marvelous are thy works*” *Ps 139*), and yet often outside influences tell us that the genetics and physical characteristics which God gave us should change. Recognizing and correcting unhelpful thinking is a great first step towards stewarding a Christ-like body image. Discomforts we feel in or with our body often signal thoughts like “I feel terrible, therefore I must look terrible” or “something looks different; therefore, I must not be valued.” These are unhealthy ways to think about your body. These felt challenges create an “all or nothing” mentality and a sense of paralysis for attempts to steward our body.

It is also important to understand the power which inputs can have on our body image. Inputs can include anything that engages our senses with an intent to satisfy, such as what we view, taste, hear, or interact with. Certain inputs have the potential to create a false sense of what brings happiness, and recognizing this influence is another key in stewarding our body image. What we focus on is often what we set as our standard of what will satisfy us. “We steer where we stare,” says a popular author, and this saying becomes a true heart-check. We want to turn toward the quick diet, latest exercise program, or newest fashion to try and find fulfillment, and these inputs tend to block the ability to feel truly fulfilled. We instead need to shift toward scriptural truth. Ask yourself these questions:

- What motivates me to steward my body? What physical characteristics about myself do I not like? What physical characteristics do I like?
- What does being an image-bearer of Christ mean to me? How does this affect how I steward my body image?
- What inputs create unhealthy body image patterns for me? What happiness myth can I fall into regarding body image? What scriptural truth helps counteract these unhealthy patterns?
- What is my awareness level of how I feel in and about my body, especially during my monthly hormone cycle? What physical, emotional, or relational differences do I notice during this time?
- If married, what areas of my body image possibly affect my marital relationship? Do my husband’s comments about my physical features matter more than others? Why?

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Body Image Stewardship

While there is no exact measure of what a healthy body image looks like, there are important factors in the physical, emotional, and relational sphere to consider. How closely you care about scriptural truth and the posture you take when caring for your physical body both will have an impact on the health of your body image. Remembering why you are “fearfully and wonderfully made” and how God has divinely and uniquely given you certain skills and talents are scriptural truths that encourage you to view yourself as God views you. In addition, stewarding your physical health and focusing appropriately on caring for your physical body as well as your emotional and relational health can help encourage a holistic view of who we are to be in Christ, thus supporting a healthy body image. Here are some individual reflection questions to consider:

- What am I physically doing in a healthy way to steward my body?
- What relationships help me stay accountable towards a healthy body-image?
- What inputs and outputs help give me a sense of value and health regarding body-image?
- Disciplining my eyes and showing some restraint on what we engage with is part of a healthy body image. What does disciplining my eyes look like?
- How can I sense a healthy body image? What does that look like?

Embracing our body image is both necessary and sanctifying to growing in Christ as females. Whatever your age, your marital status, or physical characteristics, take heart that God cares and wants us to use our body image and image-bearing for his glory. God wants us to steward our bodies well; he cares what we pay attention to and wants us to honor his name through Christ-centered values. When culture screams at us to watch, scroll, purchase, or diet, let the heart and principles of biblical and scriptural stewardship be the one and only voice we hear.