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the problem of just “looking good”

Image is everything

There's something incredibly unfair about being a teenager.

With all the hassles you face...

With all the pressures you put up with...

With all the so-called friends who will let you down...

With all those times with your parents when they don't seem to understand anything that's going on for you...

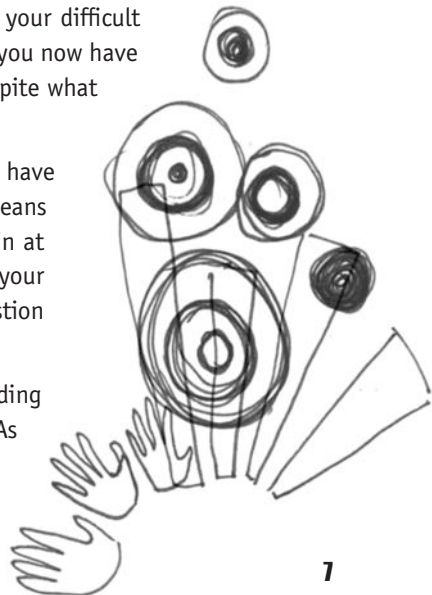
Right in the middle of the most humungous time of growth and change that you've ever experienced since the moment you were born comes **this** pressure...

“You've gotta look good!”

Somehow in the middle of struggling with your difficult feelings that are deep down on the inside, you now have to look “good” on the outside as well. Despite what the TV ad says – image **is** everything!

You know the pressure. Your friends all have designer label jeans. But you're wearing jeans that your mum bought from the bargain bin at Tesco! You can hear the judgemental tone in your friends' voices as they ask that catty question *“Where **did** you get those things?”*

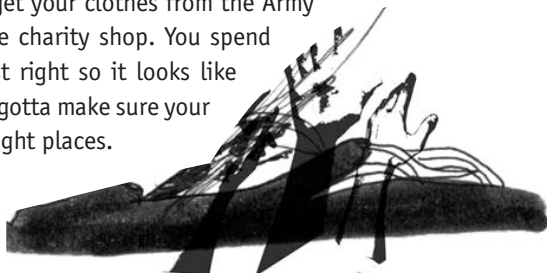
It's the night of the big party. You're spending hours getting ready for this special event. As you check yourself in the mirror, you



notice something that has the potential to turn your “night of nights” into an embarrassing social disaster. There it is – right in the middle of your chin. Yesiree – we’re talking about the dreaded enemy of puberty – **you’ve got a zit!** A big, red, hairy, throbbing, pussy zit! You apply every bit of chemical warfare known to humankind to eradicate this monster – but there it stands – tall and proud – ready to erupt like Mt. Vesuvius. You might be the greatest teenager in the world, but you know that when you meet people at the big party that night, all they will see in you is a helpless victim suffering the ravages of terminal acne.

Or maybe you’ve decided to ditch the cool image. No longer are you going to be pushed around by the fashion labels. No more will you be a victim of the glossy magazines. You’re gonna look different. But you’ve gotta take care to make sure you get that “different” look just right. You’ve gotta choose whether you get your clothes from the Army Surplus Store – or from the charity shop. You spend hours getting your hair just right so it looks like you haven’t touched it. You gotta make sure your jeans are ripped in all the right places.

It can be hard work getting that “different” look just right.



*“Hang on – I
don’t even care what I
look like!”*

Yeah – I know. You roll out of bed and put on the same clothes you wore yesterday. Your idea of changing your underwear is to turn them inside out. You wear a hat 24/7 cos you can’t be bothered brushing your hair. You refuse to submit to our society’s obsession with cleanliness – and you only shower when your mum forces you to. But can you see – **that’s** your “look”! **That’s** the image you want to portray to everyone. So whether you’re cool or grungy – you know that your image – the way you look – still matters to you.

What everybody notices

And the reason that your image matters to you? **Because it matters to everyone else!**

There are some guys hanging around after school. They notice a bunch of girls walking up the street. They start to talk to each other and make comments about the quality of the femininity that is fast approaching them.

So what are they talking about? Some of these girls might have the friendliest personalities in the known universe. Some of them have outstanding intellects that will guide them towards becoming the top neurosurgeons and nuclear physicists of this century. Others have a deep faith in God, which makes them some of the most supportive and faithful people you could ever imagine.

What are the guys noticing? What are they talking about? What are they focussing on? They're talking about **what the girls look like!** Image matters to other people.

They tell me that girls are very similar. Guys can have all sorts of admirable qualities on the inside – all sorts of potential for the future – these guys could well be developing as the leaders, the achievers, the poets, the dreamers, the dads, the lovers, the inspirers of the emerging generation.

What do the girls notice?

"Cute backside!"

POWERFUL

Maybe you realise that this is incredibly shallow and demeaning, but deep down, you know that what you look like really matters to others.

That's why every girls' magazine features yet another miracle diet that will give you the body you've always dreamed of. That's why every guys' magazine will show you ways to



increase your muscle tone and develop your abs so you can show off your perfect six-pack. How you perform at sport, or music, or dancing, or school, or whatever – you know it matters to other people and you know it matters to you.



The big companies of the world make squillions because they know we will spend up big to make our image look right. We will buy hair gel, skin cream, deodorant, expensive shoes, brand-name fashion, accessories, makeup, sound systems, cars, sunglasses, mobile phones... in fact we will buy **anything** that makes us look the way we really want.

Your Christian “image”

There’s even a Christian version of “looking good on the outside”. And I don’t just mean wearing the latest WWJD wristband, buying a new snazzy cover for your Bible, or spending your money on any of the items in the vast array of Christian merchandising like T-shirts, jewellery, perfume, bookmarks, bumper stickers, backpacks etc. And I’m also not just referring to adding to your already overflowing collection of Christian CD’s because “there’s another praise and worship album out – and I simply **have** to buy it!”

“You want people to be impressed with you – don’t you?”

Here’s what I mean. Sometimes it’s easy to look good as a Christian “on the outside”. You know – smile and be polite to people, show up at church, read your Bible, say your prayers, don’t break any



obvious commandments, get involved in your church youth group, raise your hands and look passionate in every worship song, always go forward at the appeal at the end of the talk and show everyone else what a great, humble and repentant person you really are.

While all of these things can be real and genuine, there can be the subtle temptation to do things that look good on the outside. I mean, you want people to be impressed with you – don't you?

But there's an emptiness to all this. You know that if you simply put on a brave face on the outside, but inside it feels like you're still failing, you know how fake that feels. When everyone else judges you by what you **look** like, rather than by what you're **really** like, you know how hurtful that can be. You can buy any number of books that will teach you how to act well "on the outside" – so that you impress people and succeed in the world.

But you know that unless that change is deep and powerful – and comes right from the centre of your being – no amount of spiritual plastic surgery is going to change the way you really feel. God is not fooled by simply changing the outside. People who get to know you are not fooled by it either. And you know what – **you** know how awful it feels when you are pretending on the outside, when deep down you know you are still hurting.

**God wants
to change
you from
the inside!**



Three principles that will change your life

Here's the good news: God wants to change you from the inside! God has already made you to be an awesome person, and he wants to keep changing and growing you! And he's not just interested in getting the "outside" right. He wants to bring a change deep within you – so that **all** of you will grow to be the fantastic person that he has destined you to be.

In this crazy world where young people are being torn inside-out to live up to what everyone else expects of them, I want to introduce you to three Biblical principles that can make sense of the whole shemuzzle. Three foundational truths that can help you make sense of your life. Three guidelines from God himself that will help you to become the man or woman that he has destined you to be. Three truths that will help you to become "awesome on the inside".

Ready?

Take a deep breath... here they are...

- 1. Your inside is more important than your outside.**
- 2. To change your outside, work on your inside.**
- 3. What's on the inside will always come out.**

Heh? Confused already? Come on, you can do this! Check back over the principles again – line by line – and I think you will see that they make sense. Let's have a look at them one by one.

