

Question: What would Jesus say about women who are spending thousands of dollars on the nip and tuck of plastic surgery to make themselves look younger or more beautiful?

The term plastic surgery can include a broad range of medical procedures called cosmetic surgery and reconstructive surgery. Sometimes these procedures have been used by individuals for the non-essential cosmetic purpose of enhancing outward beauty; however, we need to distinguish this from surgeries to correct things like a birth defect or reconstruction after a serious burn or accident. There are legitimate medical purposes for some plastic surgeries that have nothing to do with spending money to satisfy someone's vanity.

At the same time, we need to recognize that being beautiful or handsome is not sinful. The Bible tells us how God used the beauty of Queen Esther to save his people from mass death (Esther 2:7). Sarah, the wife of Abraham, the father of all who believe, was beautiful (Genesis 12:14) as was her daughter-in-law, Rebekah (Gen. 24:16). However, those who know the biblical stories will recognize that the beauty of these women also created problems for each of them.

A reasonable amount of attention to our outward appearance is appropriate. We should bathe, wear clean and appropriate clothes, comb our hair and cover our bodies in public so as not to purposely attract lust. In his letter to Timothy, one of the Lord's apostles wrote that women should "dress modestly, with decency and propriety" while he also discouraged the excesses of "braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes" (1 Timothy 2:9). Unfortunately, our current culture pushes the ideal and perfect feminine body and face and punishes with shame those who do not measure up. However, in the pursuit of this perfect body, many young women have destroyed their lives by anorexia and multiple unnecessary plastic surgeries that have brought pain instead of a better appearance.

Although the Bible does not give us a specific prohibition against nip and tuck surgery, it does offer some guidance. For example, God created each one of us with his or her own unique appearance and in his spiritual image (Genesis 1:27). Thus, we should not find our value in outward appearance but in being created in the image of God. This value is further enhanced by the price Jesus Christ paid for us when he came into this

world and took on himself an outward appearance that “had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him.” “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering” in order to take on himself the sins of this world and overcome this world for our eternal peace and salvation (Isaiah 53:2-5).

In addition, we are taught that true beauty is an inward quality that has more to do with holiness and righteousness than physical looks. Another of the Lord’s apostles wrote: “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight” (1 Peter 3:3-4). In the book of Proverbs, King Lemuel concluded his description of the worthy woman by saying: “Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:30). A loving, gracious personality characterized by kindness and compassion in the likeness of Jesus is much more attractive than any fake beauty queen who draws lustful looks with her plastic, physical appearance.

Whether plain or attractive, grotesque or beautiful, all our bodies will eventually be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-55); and this present world will come to an end. Jesus would remind us: “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives” (2 Peter 3:11). Why invest in a beauty that cannot last when you can have the eternal beauty of holiness as a free gift from God?

The same principles that have been applied to women also need to be considered by men who become obsessed with the perfect masculine physique and appearance. But that discussion is for another time.

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