

GIRL DEFINED

God's Radical Design for Beauty,
Femininity, and Identity

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BETHANY BAIRD



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The names and details of some of the people and situations described in this book have been changed or presented in composite form in order to ensure the privacy of those with whom the authors have worked.

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To our three younger sisters,
Ellissa, Rebekah, and Suzanna.
May you always be girls defined by God.

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Part 1

FEMININITY GONE WRONG



1. BULLIED BY THE BIG BAD CHECKLIST

My heart pounded inside my chest. I (Kristen) slowly turned the doorknob on the large glass door. Turning a metal doorknob with sweaty hands is never easy. As the modern office, with its bright white walls and black furniture, came into view, I saw a woman in her early forties with dark brown hair sitting behind a desk. *That must be her*, I thought. She turned in my direction at the sound of the door opening.

“Oh, hey, girl! Come on in,” she said with a glossy-lipped smile. “You must be . . . Kristen?” She extended a hand, and I noticed her red nails, flashy bracelets, and blingy rings.

“Yes, thanks so much for having me here today. I really appreciate your time,” I replied in a cool tone, trying to conceal my extreme nervousness. The kind of nervousness where you look like a serene beach on the outside but a Category 5 hurricane on the inside. That was me.

“Wow, I think you’re the tallest girl I have ever interviewed,” she said, her brown eyes looking me up and down. “You might be the perfect fit. Come in and take a seat.”

I took a seat in a leather chair across from her desk and crossed my legs. I waited silently for a few seconds (which felt like ten hours) while she shuffled some papers around. My mouth was desert dry at this point. I glanced around the room, wishing I had water.

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I took a seat in a white leather chair across from her desk and crossed my legs.

“Okaaay,” she finally said, looking up from her desk. “As you know, my name is Jessica Brown, and I’m the owner of this modeling agency. I’m excited about the possibility of having you join our team.

Let me explain how things work here . . .”

At that very moment, Bethany was sitting in a similar chair across town being interviewed by a completely different modeling agency.

Bethany’s Modeling Interview

“Hi, my name is Jeff. Take a seat, please,” he said in a flat tone. I (Bethany) slowly sat down in a plush tan chair.

What a dry personality, I thought to myself. *This is going to be interesting.* I glanced around the office. My eyes were instantly drawn to the image-covered wall behind Jeff. Hundreds of pictures of female models plastered the wall from top to bottom. I scanned the photos and began noticing an unsettling theme. Every model wore an “outfit” a few square inches shy of nudity. Actually, outfit would be a generous term for what these girls were wearing.

“Okay, first fill out this questionnaire and let me know when you’re finished,” he said, shocking me back to reality.

I took the form and thanked him. My heart started beating a little faster. I wasn’t nervous about getting the job anymore. I was nervous about how this interview was going to turn out. Jeff kind of creeped me out. No, he really creeped me out. The last

thing I wanted was for my picture to become a new addition to his wallpaper.

I opened the form and quickly scanned the questions on the first page.

“What type of modeling are you most interested in doing?” the opening question asked. My heart picked up the pace as I scanned the options.

- A. Swimsuit modeling
- B. Lingerie modeling
- C. Promo modeling
- D. Other

Um . . . is there an option E? With my hands becoming sticky (why does that always happen?), I gripped the pen and went on to the next question.

An Intriguing Road

Believe it or not, becoming models wasn’t always a major dream for the two of us. It was more of a vague idea. An intriguing road to try. A glamorous future to imagine. What brought us to these interviews began many years ago with a tiny seed. A thought planted. An idea mentioned. That seed took root and slowly grew in our hearts for many years. Jump back in time with us ten years from this point to see where it all started.

Me, a Glamorous Model?

It was a warm summer afternoon in Texas. (In other words, it was 98 degrees.) I (Kristen) was walking with my mom through an outdoor shopping mall. Tall for my age (twelve at the time) and lanky, I had stringy blonde hair that hung just past my shoulders.

Suddenly, a brunette woman wearing a gray pinstriped suit and pink heels approached us with a big smile.

“Excuse me!” she said. “I saw you two walking by and just had to ask: Does your daughter do any modeling?” This outgoing middle-aged stranger looked at my mom and then locked her gaze on me.

I smiled and gave her a shy no, then glanced at my mom. *A model?* I thought to myself. *At my age?* The woman quickly pulled out a business card from her suit jacket and handed it to my mom.

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Believe it or not, becoming models wasn't always a major dream for the two of us.

“Your long legs and blonde hair would make great model material,” she said excitedly. She introduced herself and explained that she and her husband worked specifically with young models, ages ten to sixteen, preparing them for a career in the industry. They owned a large house in Dallas, and many of their young modeling recruits lived with them. She told us that her models worked for the biggest agencies in

Dallas and were on their way to becoming top models.

“They also get paid really well,” she said, taking a more serious tone.

She asked my mom if we would be interested in coming to her house to look into the opportunity. She even offered a bedroom for me and said I could live at their house if I was interested! I could tell my mom was slightly shocked and flattered by her offer. In the end, my mom kindly declined, explaining that a modeling career wasn't what she or my dad had in mind for my future.

“At least talk to your husband and think about it some more,” the lady urged.

“We'll think about it,” my mom said and smiled. We thanked her and walked away to continue our shopping.

I had never thought of myself as a model until then. *A real model? A beautiful model?* A seed of curiosity took root in my

heart that day. For the first time I wondered what the life of a glamorous model would be like.

Helmet Head and Barrette Babe

While Kristen was imagining life as a model someday, I (Bethany) was still very much immersed in being a kid. I was sweet and innocent and couldn't have cared less about looking "pretty." Even though I'm only a year and a half younger than Kristen, I wasn't as interested in growing up quickly.

With short, frizzy hair, a partial unibrow, huge glasses, and missing teeth, I'll be the first to admit that I was not much to look at. If someone had told me then that I would interview for a modeling job someday, I would have given them my famous cross-eyed look.

It wasn't until Kristen began paying more attention to her clothes and hair that I became curious about beauty as well. Little sisters want to be like their big sisters. Although Kristen's newfound interest in looking pretty was getting stronger, she didn't quite know how to put it into action yet. Brushing her hair into a super tight ponytail, then dousing her head with hairspray was her version of a fashionable look. In fact, she doused her head with so much hairspray that she acquired the flattering nickname "Helmet Head." Our family still jokes about her helmet-head look.

As the months went by, I finally developed my own interest in beauty and decided to try a few "fashion" looks of my own. One day before church, I opened up a pack of metal hair barrettes. Instead of using one, two, or even three, I thought it would be cool to put the entire pack in my hair. After securing a tight ponytail

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(no hairspray for me), I lined both sides of my head with dozens of shimmering barrettes (hence the reason I didn't need hairspray). If only you could have seen the look of satisfaction on my face. Oh yeah. Barrette babe coming through! I headed out the door thinking I was the hottest chick on the planet.

Looking back on our childhood always makes me and Kristen

laugh. You probably laugh at yours too. We thought we were totally cool and hip when it came to our fashion choices. Although we were young and fashion illiterate, something was changing in us. Our desire to be beautiful and valued by the people around us began to form. We began noticing the beautiful faces on billboards. The sensual women on magazine covers. The perfect hair on shampoo commercials. The bone-thin models on mall posters. We noticed these things—and

we liked them. These images appealed to our inner desire to be beautiful. To be feminine. To be women.

The prevailing secular culture enticed us with its version of femininity. Its perception of romance. Its idea of family. Its explanation of success.

Little by little the subtle undertow of our culture's ideology shaped our views of womanhood.

Am I as Pretty as Sally?

Do you remember how old you were when you started to care about being pretty?

As little girls, it seems like the first insecurity we pick up revolves around our looks. Then we grow a little older and worry about our talents. Then our jobs. Then our husbands. Then our kids. Then our houses. Then our success. Overall, our worth.

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around us
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We're constantly asking ourselves if we're good enough, if we have all the right ducks in the right rows. What started out as a simple *Am I as pretty as Sally?* when we were twelve turns into an identity crisis when we're thirty.

From the time we were little girls until now, our culture has been feeding us messages of what womanhood is all about. We each took note of what sounded good to us. We internalized a running identity checklist. *Oh, that's what womanhood is about? Got it. Check. Oh, I'm supposed to be that skinny? Got it. Check. Oh, I'm supposed to have a successful career? Got it. Check. Oh, I'm supposed to get married when I'm young . . . older . . . never? Um, got it. Check. I think.*

From the first moment a woman questions her identity, she begins wondering about her womanhood and whether she measures up. Our big bad identity checklist is always growing. But what makes things even more complicated is that the rules are always changing. One year our culture strongly encourages us to get married by a certain age. Then five years later the age has changed! One year we are considered successful if we graduate with an undergrad degree. Then several years later we need a master's degree to be deemed truly successful. One year culture says we should have babies younger. Then five years later we're supposed to wait until we're older—or skip having babies altogether.

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The list is endless. When are we, as women, good enough? What does it take to become a “complete” woman? What is true femininity supposed to look like? What does it mean to be successful? How pretty is pretty enough? Are happiness and fulfillment a reality or only a dream?

Millions of women just like you, just like us, have been asking these same questions for a long time. We've tried everything we know how to do, but it isn't working. We're not satisfied. We're not happy. We're not peaceful. The results of this endless searching are devastating. The two of us have seen it ruin girls and women over and over again. Is this all there is for women? Is what we see as good as it gets?

In short, absolutely not. No way. Our culture's version of womanhood is a far (and we mean far) cry from who God designed us to be. He has something radically better for womanhood. Something much more fulfilling than a checklist. We'll unpack what that means in the pages to come.

Why We Wrote This Book

Instead of offering you a new beauty cream, a better career choice, a higher form of education, or a handsome prince on a white horse, we want to recommend something better. Something you won't find in the culture. We're here to throw a flag on the field of modern femininity and say, "Enough is enough." It's not working. It's time to try something different.

The reason we wrote this book is to give you a radically better vision for what true womanhood is all about. The only hope we have as women is to stop defining ourselves according to other people's standards and start defining it according to God's Word. In order to become all God created you to be, you have to gain a vision for what true God-defined femininity is all about.

As Elisabeth Elliot says so well,

We are called to be women. The fact that I am a woman does not make me a different kind of Christian, but the fact that I am a Christian does make me a different kind of woman. For I have accepted God's idea for me, and my whole life is an offering back to Him of all that I am and all that He wants me to be.¹

We don't claim to have all the answers, but we do have some. God has shown us incredible, life-changing truths about womanhood that we cannot keep to ourselves. The results of following God's design far outweigh the results culture has ever promoted.

As a result of following God's plan, we can honestly say we are each happier, more fulfilled, and more content than we have ever been in our lives. God's Word is true, and his version of womanhood offers lasting results.

Throughout the pages of this book, you will discover

- why God created the female gender,
- what your purpose is as a woman,
- how to obtain lasting worth,
- what true beauty looks like,
- how to apply femininity to your romantic relationships,
- what God's idea of a working woman looks like, and
- how to leave behind a lasting legacy that doesn't fade with time.

God is looking for women like you to courageously go against the grain of modern culture. He needs women who are brave. Women who will set a new trend, think outside the box, and raise the bar for femininity. He needs women who refuse to live for the applause of this world and instead live for the applause of their King.

Susan Hunt, a godly woman and author says, "It is time for women of biblical faith to reclaim our territory. We know the Designer. We have His instruction manual. If we don't display the Divine design of His female creation, no one will. But if we do, it will be a profound testimony to a watching, needy world."²

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No matter how old you are or what season of life you're in, if you're a woman, this book is for you. Your story is far from complete. Our stories are far from complete. Not many women have the courage to put down the pen for their big bad identity checklist. But those who do have discovered something remarkable. Something life transforming.

You'll meet some of these women throughout this book. They stopped allowing the culture to define their womanhood. They stood up to the big bad bully of counterfeit femininity and said, "No more!"

Instead, they've chosen to become girls defined by God. The results are astounding. We've tried it. And it's undoubtedly worth it.

Watch out though. Radical things happen when God gets ahold of your checklist.

CHAPTER 1

STUDY GUIDE

STASH IT IN YOUR HEART

Stop defining your femininity according to the culture, and start defining it according to God's Word.

1. How old were you when you started to care about being pretty? What prompted you to start caring?

2. Every woman has a big bad checklist. Check all the boxes that apply to you: *I have sought to find my identity and worth through . . .*

- Being perfectly skinny
- Having a pretty face
- Maintaining a successful career
- Keeping a boyfriend
- Getting married
- Being independent
- Owning nice things
- Wearing the latest trends
- Traveling to nice places
- Being athletic

- Accomplishing academic goals
- Gathering many friends
- Other _____
- Other _____

How many boxes did you check? Why are you seeking to find your identity in those things?

3. What are your biggest insecurities right now?

4. What do you think will bring you lasting worth and satisfaction?

5. Name three things you are hoping to learn by reading this book:

MAKE IT HAPPEN *Today*

To start things off, take a moment right now to pray and ask God to help you get the most out of this book.

PS: We're excited you're reading it!