

Does the Bible address body image?

Answer from GotQuestions.org: The Bible has a lot to say about our bodies--both good and bad. We know from Genesis 2, Psalm 139:13-14, and from Job 10:11 that our bodies were hand-made by God Himself. He created each of us exactly the way He wanted us. Even what we call handicaps or infirmities, God allowed for His purposes.(John 9:2-3)

That can be difficult for us to understand, because we base our judgment solely on our comparison with others and our limited insight. But God has His own reasons for what He allows. We do know from Scripture that all things were made for His purpose and His pleasure. (Col. 1:16) He made you like that because He likes you like that.

When we give our lives to Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside us, making our bodies His temple. (I Cor. 6:19) So whether thin or fat, short or tall, ugly or beautiful, your body is holy. God likes it and expects you to take care of it as you would a holy place. He sees it with different eyes than you do. He sees a unique individual who can reflect His glory a little differently than anyone else can.

Our current obsession with physical perfection is not God's plan. In fact, it is not even a real standard, since ideals in beauty change from era to era, from culture to culture. What was considered perfect female beauty five hundred years ago would now never grace the cover of *Vogue*. What the Zulu tribe in Africa considers attractive would raise most of our eyebrows.

So there really is no ultimate standard of beauty. Our standards come from the culture around us, and God has always given stern instructions that His people were not to take on the ways of the pagans around them. (Deut. 18:9; 2 Cor. 6:17) When we start modeling ourselves after the world, it is only a matter of time before we fall into idolatry. Examples of modern idolatry are materialism, workaholicism, over-spending, unnecessary cosmetic surgeries, and the many other addictions crippling our world. They become the focus of life, rather than glorifying God, and that makes them idols. When we see these things in epidemic proportions, that is a sure sign a culture has fallen away from God's plan.

Our bodies have needs, urges, and pains that must be addressed. If left to their own devices, our bodies would get us in trouble. The reason for God's law is so that our spirits can take charge of our bodies and keep them under control. If we followed every whim or urge of our flesh, we would live like animals.

Romans 12:1-2 commands us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, to use for His honor. Romans 6:12-14 goes a step further and talks about offering the specific members of our bodies as servants of God. When we realize that our mouths belong to Jesus, we are more careful what comes out or goes in. When we consider our arms were bought by Jesus' blood, we don't have the right to cut them out of anger or hurt.

Body image is just one more area Satan has invaded as he persuades millions of people that their bodies are inferior to those around them and that they should indulge in self-hatred, mutilation, anorexia, or a host of other dishonoring practices. According to Scripture, our bodies were designed by God, given to us to house our spirits, and a means by which He can use us on this earth. (I Cor. 10:31)

When we abuse our bodies through obsessing, overeating, under-eating, mutilation, etc. we are dishonoring the temple of the Living God. If you belong to Christ, He has already bought and paid for you. Your body is not your own to do with as you please. (I Cor. 6:20) It belongs to Him. To focus on your body apart from your soul and spirit is unhealthy and leads to sinful choices. God doesn't focus on your outward appearance, but on those hidden places in your heart. (Is. 16:7) He is far more concerned with the idolatry budding in your heart than he is about whatever body type you may have.

Is. 53:2 tells us that Jesus was not particularly attractive when he walked this earth. He took on very ordinary looks so that He could identify with all of us very ordinary individuals. He wasn't muscle-bound, basketball-tall, or stunningly handsome. There was nothing spectacular about His physical body, but His spirit shone with such radiance that it changed the world. The burdens he carried for us made it seem as though he was muscular. The kindness in his face made him seem handsome. The thousands who heard his messages, in the days without microphones, would have sworn he was ten feet tall.

As His followers, our ideal can't be whatever whim the world currently possesses. Even if you manage to achieve it, it quickly fades and you've wasted your life chasing it. (Prov. 31:30)

Our ideal is our Savior. We need to focus on him so that we can look just like Him.