Do I Look Fat?

Ahhh….summer. Fun in the sun. For many, that is synonymous with two dreaded words: "swimsuit season." We live in a weight-obsessed culture, one that glorifies thinness. For ten million girls and women in this country, and for nearly one million boys and men, this quest for the "perfect body" leads to life-threatening eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. Without treatment, 5 to 20% of individuals with severe eating disorders will die.

Many factors combine to contribute to the development of an eating disorder. Some of these include low self-esteem, perfectionism, feeling inadequate or out of control of one's life, troubled family relationships, peer pressure, media influences, depression or anxiety, and genetic tendencies.

People often turn to an unhealthy obsession with dieting and body dissatisfaction because they have learned that their worth and value is dependent upon their appearance and achievements. We need to focus on what's inside. We need to challenge ourselves to build inner character, not just better bodies. Psalm 139:14 says, "I will praise Him for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." We are God's works of art.

We also need to challenge ourselves to get real about the media images bombarding us daily. These images have been taped, tucked, airbrushed and altered. Fashion models are thinner than 98% of women in the United States, and Americans spend 40 billion dollars a year on diet-related products! Seems like a waste, doesn't it? "Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Sounds like wise advice.

People with eating disorders and body image disturbances use this focus on food and weight as a way to cope with feelings and situations. Rather than know how to handle legitimate emotions, they've learned to channel them into "fat feelings." They must learn how to build self-esteem, strengthen healthy relationships, and turn to a loving Father to comfort them and strengthen them in the storms of life.

Parents: instill healthy eating and exercise habits in your children, modeling balance, variety, and moderation; but affirm them for who they are rather than for how they look. Teach them that they are more than a number on a scale. Help them develop their inner beauty and character. Don't berate your own bodies in front of your children.

It's tough to feel good about our bodies in a body-conscious world. We all have flaws and imperfections that we wish we could change, but we must put it in perspective. Women, challenge yourself to eliminate the question "Does this make me look fat?" from your daily conversations. Diet-conscious parents,

refrain from discussing calories, carbs, fat grams, and dress sizes in front of your impressionable pre-teen. Practice the language of feelings instead of the "language of fat."

So this swimsuit season, let's focus on what's important: fun with family and friends, deepening our faith, and remembering that God cares about what's in our hearts, not the size of our thighs.

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