

8 GODLY TRUTHS  
TO SHARE WITH YOUR GIRL

# RAISING A BODY-CONFIDENT DAUGHTER



DANNAH GRESH  
FOUNDER OF TRUE GIRL

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*Grow in grace and in the knowledge of  
our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

2 PETER 3:18







# A BIG SQUEEZE TO:

If you're one of the more than a million moms and daughters who have participated in one of our True Girl online Bible studies, attended a live True Girl event, or used one of our printed resources to get closer to each other and to Jesus, I wish I could hug you right now. (I've loved getting to know you through Instagram and Facebook.) Every time you show up, you are standing with me to say that what God instructs about womanhood matters. Thank you!

I also want to thank Harvest House Publishers for partnering with us for the exciting growth of True Girl. This publishing house is built on the Word of God...literally. A copy of the Bible is buried in the foundation of the building to remind them what matters. And that matters to me. I'm especially grateful to Barb Sherrill and Gene Skinner, who have been indispensable as we figure out how to meet the needs of all those True Girls.

It seems fitting to also thank Suzy Weibel, since a few paragraphs in this book started in a book that she wrote, but I ended up stealing them (with her permission) for this book! Suzy never complains when we strategize like this and change things—she just trusts Jesus and me. What a good friend!

Eileen King, for plowing the ground for me to write. She creates the fertile soil of time by taking the weight of many things off my back so I can get away from the office and write until my fingers are sore! I'm sure hers are too. This book came from her heart as much as mine!

While I'm at the task of squeezing, I'm so grateful for my main squeeze, Bob. True Girl was his idea, and he has been a faithful visionary and CEO. Bob has married administrative genius and patience to lead us through 15 marvelous years of bringing girls and their moms closer to each other and to God.

Mostly, thanks to Jesus, whom I long to be with every day. May my body be his living sacrifice.

—*Dannah*



# CONTENTS

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1. Why Your Daughter Needs Body Confidence . . . . .	9
2. Starting with You . . . . .	15
3. Helping Your Daughter to Be Body Confident . . . . .	23
4. Conversation One: Your Body, a Purpose . . . . .	31
5. Conversation Two: Your Body, Its Practice . . . . .	41
6. Conversation Three: Your Body, God's Temple . . . . .	53
7. Conversation Four: Your Hair, a Crown . . . . .	65
8. Conversation Five: Food, Your Fuel . . . . .	73
9. Conversation Six: Exercise, Your Strength . . . . .	87
10. Conversation Seven: Your Body, a Source of Life . . . . .	99
11. Conversation Eight: Your Body, a Sacrifice . . . . .	109
Spirit Versus Body Challenge . . . . .	115
Notes . . . . .	137



# WHY YOUR DAUGHTER NEEDS BODY CONFIDENCE

I met sweet Hannah Banana—excuse my tendency to nickname everyone I meet—when she was about eight, but I’d seen her picture long before I met her. She was a model for the cover of a music CD as a tween girl. In the close-up photo, her eyes were closed in worship as she tilted her head boldly to the sky, sending a contented smile in heaven’s direction. Her skin was naked—free from any kind of makeup, including powder or lip gloss. In stark contrast to a picture-perfect world, her beauty did not come from perfection on the outside but something internal.

But this was just a photo, right?

Wrong.

Real-life Hannah, who was athletic and nearly always in basketball shorts and a T-shirt because she just didn’t care what she wore, *always* had that look on her face. Contagious peace. Her beauty came from deep within.

Imagine my absolute shock when, several years after meeting her, I learned something that might have kept her from exuding so much confidence. Hannah was missing most of her fingers on her left hand. I noticed it the day she came to school with her arm in a cast from a recent break. I was so shocked, I gasped and asked if her hand was

swollen, thinking maybe that was why her fingers looked short. But they just weren't there! I had never noticed. More importantly, Hannah didn't seem to notice either. She typed, played basketball, wrote papers, and cooked—all with a significant handicap but also with exquisite natural beauty and total confidence. Today she is a young woman in her first job as a teacher. She remains rather makeup free and unconcerned with what she wears, but she is as breathtaking as ever.

Contrast her to a girl we will just call Jane. I saw a photo of her before I met her too. Her features were flawless. Perfectly crafted nose, full lips, gorgeous deep brown eyes, and dark skin. But there was no smile on her face. Just a hollow stare that hid her beauty. I remember wondering what could possibly have made her sad enough to wear such a haunted look on her face.

When I met her as a preteen, fear was etched all over her, though it was somewhat ebbd by (of all things) shopping. A smile or giggle would sneak through from time to time, but her face primarily remained in that state of haunted beauty. Buying clothes seemed to make this tween forget her insecurities. Experimenting with makeup was fun at first but soon seemed to be *necessary*. An obsession with name brands led to a spending problem. I strongly suspect an eating disorder set in sometime during her teen years. Today she is a skeleton of a young woman with little life direction. She cakes herself with makeup that makes her look like a clown, she's literally ashamed if she's not wearing brand-name clothes, and she can't look in the mirror without crying on a daily basis.

What's the difference between Hannah and Jane? Hannah has body confidence, and Jane suffers from body consciousness.

You may have picked up this book to help your daughter be more like Hannah and less like Jane. Will your daughter struggle with an eating disorder or use food as her fuel? Will she use exercise to beat her body into a skeletal size or use it to make her strong for her life call? Will she look in the mirror with self-loathing or with confidence? These are reasonable concerns for a mom raising a girl in our body-conscious society—and good reasons to be a mom who coaches your daughter into body confidence.

## What Is Body Consciousness?

*Consciousness* is the awareness of an external object or something within oneself. Simply put, anything we are aware of at a specific moment is something about which we are conscious.

*Body consciousness* is the state of being constantly aware of the body—either others' or your own, but mostly your own. It can include obsession with clothing and makeup, nonstop surveillance of the appearance of others or yourself, deep body shame, sexualization of self or others, and unending appearance management. (Can't walk by a mirror without checking yourself? You might have some issues with body consciousness! Don't worry, friend. We'll tackle our own junk in this book too.)

Our society idolizes the body. Everything is about how we look and who is beautiful. Of course, beauty is often determined by a makeup palette, designer-name brands, and a little Photoshop magic. When we stop to consider the messages that perpetuate this plague, we find they are motivated by another idol—the almighty dollar. People can become rich by creating a society in which our appearance matters more than anything else. And if manufacturers, retailers, and marketers start early, they'll have “cradle to grave” customers. That's why our girls are at risk *now*!

In recent years, retailers have rolled out everything from thong underwear called Eye Candy to padded bikini-top bras for girls aged eight to twelve. Eyeliner and mascara sales for this age group doubled. (Someone tell me why little girls need those products!) I believe Christians need to remain positive and avoid boycotting when possible, but I've helped moms to gently but unflinchingly confront retail giants that peddle products that make our daughters grow up too fast.

Unfortunately, only a tiny minority of moms are concerned about these issues.

Girls aged eight to twelve spend about \$500 million a year on beauty products alone.<sup>1</sup> At least one brand now markets its make up to girls as young as four. As long as moms let their daughters keep spending, marketers will continue targeting this age group. *It's all about money.* Once when I was crying out publicly for awareness regarding this, I was interviewed by *Women's Wear Daily*, the global bible of the fashion industry.



At that time, I was leading 25,000 concerned moms who had recently selected three retailers that consistently provide age-appropriate clothing and products for our daughters. We agreed to arm ourselves with time and money and Shop till We Drop in an effort to say thanks to these outlets. (It was a reverse boycott. We were sending a message in a positive way.) The media covered our event, and I was thrilled.

In a round of phone tag, one of my team members asked a reporter, “What will it take for the industry to start caring about what it’s doing to our daughters?”

The reporter replied, “They don’t care. It’s all about money to them. You shouldn’t take it personally. It’s just a financial thing.”

I take it very personally. And so should you, because the stakes are incredibly high!

## The Risks of Body Consciousness

A two-year study by the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (a title that has the stench of body consciousness) revealed that products and marketing that target tween girls are linked to eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression, and early sexual activity.<sup>2</sup> (Read: They create body consciousness.) Isn’t it ironic that instead of making girls feel good about their bodies, all these “beauty” products make our daughters—and sometimes us—feel fat or unattractive? Body consciousness will not serve your daughter well. Here are the two big overriding risks of body-conscious living.

**Body consciousness creates a hyperawareness of every flaw, unique beauty mark, or divergence from the media’s norm of beauty.** This hyperawareness influences the way your daughter cares for herself and can be lethal. For example, consider the way tween girls think about food. The *Washington Post* has lamented the growing number of younger and younger patients at eating disorder clinics around the nation.

“A decade ago, new eating disorder patients at Children’s National Medical Center tended to be around age 15,” says

Adelaide Robb, director of inpatient psychiatry. “Today kids come in as young as 5 and 6.”<sup>3</sup>

Low self-esteem, depression, and an early sexual debut—which are all related to what our girls believe about their bodies and their beauty—are big risks when our girls become victims of body consciousness. Before we know it, hyperawareness of a crooked tooth or a zit becomes an excuse for cutting or drives our once-giggling girls into a deep depression. It has to stop!

**More harmful still, body consciousness creates an extreme focus on the body at the expense of your daughter’s spirit.** Children are supposed to be learning right from wrong between the ages of eight and ten, not how to accessorize an outfit or put on mascara. They should be learning to live healthy emotional, mental, and spiritual lives, not getting lost in tween dating drama or competitive unofficial beauty contests at school. If they fall prey to society’s body-conscious norms, they will become overly focused on their external beauty, often at the expense of tending to their spirit.

Consider this—the average (that is, normal) person between the ages of nine and seventeen scores as high on anxiety scales as children who were admitted to psychological clinics for severe disorders in the 1950s. We simply have not been tending to the spirits of our children or teaching them the art of tending their own spirits. (All the while, their name-brand duds are often picture perfect!)

## **What Is Body Confidence?**

It’s time to push the reset button, but take care how you do so. It’s not that your daughter’s body is bad. In fact, her valuable but temporal body houses her eternal spirit, and if she has a relationship with Jesus Christ, it is the temple of God. Her body is good and useful, which brings us to the definition of body confidence.

*Confidence* is full trust in or reliability of people or things. It’s being able to depend on things or people to do what they are supposed to do.

*Body confidence* is the awareness of your body's purpose and ability to depend on it to do what God designed it to do without making too much or too little of it. When our thoughts about our bodies are based on God's intended purpose, we experience God-esteem, not self-esteem. And if we esteem God, we will understand the great value of our bodies without making too much of them.

Here's the key. As you teach your daughter to confidently care for her body, emphasize the care of her spirit and teach her to press in to godliness. Of course, we can't give our daughters what we don't have. This book will give you what you need to move your daughter away from body consciousness and its risks and toward the glorious beauty of body confidence. But I have to warn you, we're going to dive in headfirst to make sure that you and I have shaken off every bit of our own body consciousness and are learning to wear the beauty that comes with body confidence.

Trust me, you're gonna like how this feels!

*While bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8).*