

Less Than Beautiful

On Sunday, Jeff shared the story of how Pastor Danny Cortez went from disliking his appearance to embracing it wholeheartedly.

1. Warm up question: What celebrity best represents your own personal idealized standard of beauty?
2. Like most of us, Danny Cortez began to form ideas about his own appearance as a child. When he was born in the Philippines, his relatives congratulated his mother on birthing a “Mestizo baby” – a term that refers to light skinned people, like the Spaniards who colonized the Philippines. When Danny was 4, his family moved to Los Angeles. When Danny returned to the Philippines for a visit at age 10, no one recognized him because his skin had darkened. When Danny’s mother re-introduced him to her relatives, his Aunt blurted out, “Oh my God, he got ugly.” On top of that, Danny’s Mom always squeezed his nose to try to make it narrower, and took him to the doctor to see if anything could be done to increase his height. As a result, Danny learned to think of himself as unattractive and undesirable.
 - a. As a child, what messages about your appearance – positive or negative – did you internalize?
 - b. Is how we feel about our appearance important? Why or why not?
 - c. Read Isaiah 53:1-3. Assuming this prophetic passage offers an accurate description of Jesus’ physical appearance, what kind of feelings about his appearance might Jesus have wrestled with growing up?
3. There was a time when full figured woman were considered ideally beautiful, but recently the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. There was a time when hairy-chested men were considered ideally beautiful, but recently the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. How do you think cultural standards of beauty get set? Why do they change over time?
4. For Danny Cortez, his personal journey to break away from narrow cultural definitions of beauty began when he started to confront his internalized prejudices and stereotypes about LGBT people. Danny became friends with Ruben, a gay neighbor, who challenged his prejudice. Convicted, Danny began hanging out with Ruben, meeting his friends, and discovering how beautiful LGBT people are. That, in turn, caused Danny to reexamine all the cultural messages he had internalized about what makes people wonderful and attractive. In your own life journey, when have you had a Ruben-like experience? In other words, when has a friendship with someone different from you changed the way you think about a certain kind of person?

5. On Sunday, Jeff shared a series of tweets from Danny's four children that were prompted when a friend of theirs, watching the halftime show at the Super Bowl, tweeted, "Bruno Mars is amazing. Too bad he's short." That prompted Danny's eldest son (21 years old) to push back, saying, "I come from a community that is never seen as good enough for reasons that we have no control over – our color, our height, our noses. And because we're continually told these things, we begin to believe them."
 - a. Read Psalm 139:13-18. Do you think God deliberately designed you to look the way you do? Why or why not?
 - b. Genesis 1:31 says, "God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was exceedingly beautiful." If you're comfortable doing so, name a feature of your appearance that you're insecure about. How do you think God wants you to think about that feature?
6. Aging also often affects how we feel about our appearance. How have your feelings about your appearance changed as you've aged? Is older less beautiful?
7. Danny's wife said, "If I don't see myself as beautiful, if I can't accept myself for what I am, if I can't see my own beauty, nobody's going to ever believe me when I tell them that they're beautiful." She goes on to say, "What you believe to be true about yourself is truer than what you say you believe about me." What do you think she means? Do you agree?
8. Psalm 96:9 says, "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." We typically interpret this to mean, "Honor God's holiness by creating worship as beautiful as possible." But Jeff suggested the verse may also mean, "Honor God's holiness by coming to worship with a heart that fully embraces your beauty." If true, that suggests we can't worship God with our whole being until we embrace our own beauty. Your thoughts?
9. The tipping point for Danny on his journey to acceptance came when he watched his friend from high school perform in a drag show. Seeing how everyone in the audience celebrated his friend's flamboyant beauty caused Danny to take another look at his friend and realize, "Oh my God, she is beautiful." For him it was a Jesus moment; he was finally able to see his friend through the eyes of Jesus. The next morning, Danny looked himself in the mirror and said, "Darn, you are beautiful!" And finally he felt completely happy to be in his skin and in his body.
 - a. Are you able to look yourself in the mirror and say, "Darn, you are beautiful!" Why or why not?
 - b. What can help us grow our appreciation for our beauty?