

You've probably heard the expression, "Mirror, mirror on the wall..." How does the rest of it go? "Who's the fairest of them all?" In the fairy tale "Snow White," the queen uttered these words into her magic mirror each morning to be certain she was the prettiest woman in the entire kingdom. The mirror replied back each day that she was the prettiest, until the mirror one day replied that Snow White was the fairest of all.

Although I doubt any of us has a magic mirror, I imagine each one of us looks into a mirror from time to time to check our appearance. When's the last time you checked in a mirror?

Our culture seems to revolve around how we look, with commercials telling us their products will help us look better. Teenage girls especially feel the pressure, and they often wonder if they look good enough, as one middle school girl asked in a YouTube video she posted online back in December 2010.¹ She made what she calls a random video to see whether she was ugly or not. She explains that

"a lot of people call me ugly, and I think I am ugly...but my friends who are girls say 'You are so beautiful.'" Although she later wrote that she made this video as a dare and it was "uploaded by surprise by a friend," she was amazed at how many people viewed the video—almost 7 million people!

I wonder why so many people have viewed this video? Could it be because many relate to her question and are asking the same thing as she did—wondering if they look good enough?

Not only do we often worry about our own appearance in the mirror, we sometimes get concerned about the appearance of others in the mirror, as was the case during the recent Olympics. I was amazed to watch 16-year-old gymnast Gabby Douglas dance across the floor; she became the first U.S. gymnast to win the gold medals in team and all-around competition. Comments about her performance filled the internet as people tweeted about...of all things, her hair. Although I was fascinated with her gracefulness and strength on

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the parallel bars, some were more concerned about her appearance. She told one interviewer:

I don't know where this is coming from. What's wrong with my hair? I'm like, 'I just made history and people are focused on my hair?' It can be bald or short, it doesn't matter about (my) hair. Nothing is going to change. I'm going to wear my hair like this during beam and bar finals. You might as well just stop talking about it. I don't think people should be worried about that. We're all champions and we're all winners. I just say that it's kind of, a stupid and crazy thought to think about my hair.²

Luckily when Gabby looked in the mirror she saw a champion, but she also saw the same reflection in the mirrors of others. Whether someone was in the Olympics or not, she recognized that we are all champions in some way.

I think that when James wrote his letter to the church 2000 years ago he would have agreed with Gabby that everyone is a champion, for he noted

that God gives generously to everyone (1:5). In response to what God does for us, James suggested that our faith in God prompts us to do good works in how we treat one another.

The issue of faith vs. works has been debated throughout the history of the church, for some have suggested that our action is what gets God's attention to love us or save us. Others have suggested that it's not our actions that save us, but what God does that saves us. These arguments came to a climax during the Reformation when Martin Luther challenged some of the church's teachings. When he translated the Bible into German, his first edition in 1522 called the book of James "an epistle of straw," though in later editions he deleted this comment.³ In comparing James to other portions of the New Testament, he noticed that the writer Paul focused more on what *Jesus* has done for us, but James seemed to focus more on *our* actions and behaviors. Luther felt the core of

the Christian message should be on what *Christ* has done and not on what *we* do.

I think the issue is like a two-sided coin: one cannot have tails without heads. In a similar manner, both works and faith in Christ are two sides of our relationship with God. What we do will not make us better in God's eyes or save us, for only God can do that; and yet, what we do does make a difference to God and those around us. And that's where the mirror comes into play.

James suggested in his letter that those who hear about God and then don't do anything are like those who look in the mirror and then forget what they have seen. They not only forget about their own reflection in the mirror, but they forget about how God is reflected in their lives.

When people look at you and me, I imagine some may hope to catch a reflection of Christ in us, a small glimmer of hope or an example of peace. And that's why James wrote that we should be "quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger," for

these are like reflections in a mirror that help us see what God is like. If we are quick to listen, someone may hear an echo of God's voice whispering in her ear. If we are slow to speak, someone may catch a glimpse of God's patience. If we are slow to anger, others may catch a reflection of God's peace.

I don't think James was suggesting that God will love us more if we act a certain way, but I think he was implying that others will see a reflection of God through the way we act, as was the case with a certain downtown businessman [who had] became fond of the little boy who shined his shoes every day. He did such a good job that one day the businessman asked him, "Son, how come you are so conscientious about your work?" The boy felt complimented. He looked up to the man, and said, "Mister, I'm a Christian and I try to shine every pair of shoes as if Jesus Christ were wearing them."

The businessman saw something genuine in the shoeshine boy. Soon after that he began

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reading his Bible. When he decided to be a Christian himself, he credited his decision to the little boy who shined every pair of shoes “as if Jesus Christ were wearing them.”⁴

Sometimes life seems so difficult and complicated that for some, hope seems so far away. There are many in the world that just need a glimpse of hope, a tiny reflection of light reflected in the mirror of our lives. But for many, hope seems farther away than it really is, as though they are looking in a car rearview mirror that says “Objects in the mirror are closer than they appear.” Hope

may be standing right behind them, but it may appear so far away without the light of Christ helping them gain perspective.

It may be that when someone looks in the mirror of your life that hope will seem much closer, so I invite you this week to reflect the light of Christ, to be a mirror and bring hope to someone searching for a glimmer of God’s love.

¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8D9mqgkgH-0>

² “Gabby Douglas Hair Comments Confuse The Olympic Gymnast,” 08/05/12, www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/05/gabby-douglas-hair-olympics-2012_n_1743897.html

³ <http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php?itemid=1892>

⁴ Charles R. Leary, *Mission Ready!*, CSS Publishing Company.