THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. 1 Peter 3:3-4

When Christopher Columbus decided it was time to go home, one of his sailors, Juan Ponce De Leon, decided to stay behind in Puerto Rico. He had heard rumors that to the north of Cuba lay a mystical source of water which rejuvenated those who splashed in it. Thus in 1513 Ponce De Leon landed on the Florida coast in search of the Fountain of Youth. Unfortunately he didn't find it and died eight years later.

Today, however, plastic surgeons, beauticians, and cosmetologists have tapped into the gold reserves of those seeking the fountain of youth. Cosmetic plastic surgery has become the rage of a growing army of people—mostly women but not women exclusively—who want to look ten years younger. They are going to great lengths and even greater costs to beat the reality that you can't expect to look like you're twenty when you are fifty.

Question: Why the surge of discontent when we look in the mirror? The fixation of youth, the feeling that if guys don't ogle at you or girls don't admire your Brad Pitt muscles, you can get it all fixed by a trip to the plastic surgeon. There is no questioning the fact that the media has created the discontentment. As the most powerful force in our culture, the media—including television, billboards, movies, and glossy magazines—makes us painfully aware that most of us, especially those who have raised several kids, just don’t quite look like movie stars.

Usually there’s money enough to pay for the transformation; and even if there isn’t, a credit card can cover the cost of plastic surgery, and you can worry about paying it after you start looking terrific.

What most bothers me is that the search for the fountain of youth is all exterior—it’s all superficial—while we totally neglect the real beauty of life, that which comes from within. As Marie Stopes put it: “You can take no credit for beauty at sixteen. But if you are beautiful at sixty, it will be your soul’s own doing.”

We have become victims of the self-cult that focuses on the wrong thing. In countries of the world where starvation is rampant, few give any thought to whether or not having their nose reshaped might enhance their appearance. But everyone isn’t happy over the issues of nose surgeries. Take, for example, Park Sung-jun, a practitioner of Korean art of telling fortunes. According to the Wall Street Journal, cosmetic surgery is getting in the way of his craft. “If someone comes to me,” he says, “who has a lot of plastic surgery, I can’t read their faces.” How sad!

The 20 million children in sub-Saharan Africa who have been orphaned by AIDS are not concerned with liposuction or having less fat around their middle. The greatest concern is if they have enough to eat, a place to sleep, and hope for tomorrow.

We have lost sight of the fact that what you are is more important than what you look like, and that inherent beauty, the kind that demonstrates a gentle spirit and loving heart, never fades, grows weary or goes out of style.

Peter addressed this kind of beauty, saying, “Don’t be concerned about the outward beauty that depends on fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should be known for the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God” (1 Peter 3:3-4 NLT).

The real fountain of youth is within—not without. It’s the kind that is obvious when Christ indwells a life. It’s something that doesn’t fade with age nor can it be enhanced with cosmetics.

Resource reading: Colossians 3:1-11