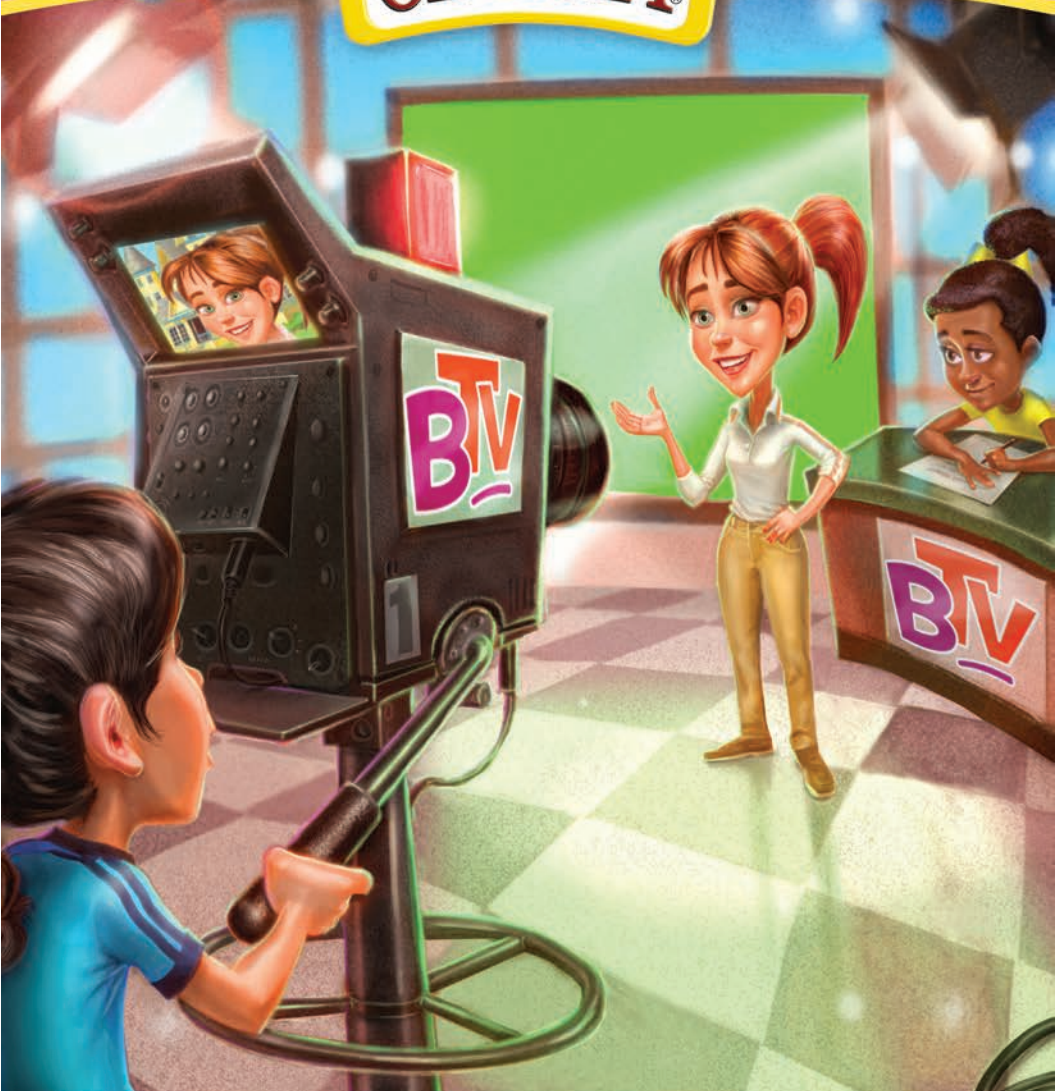


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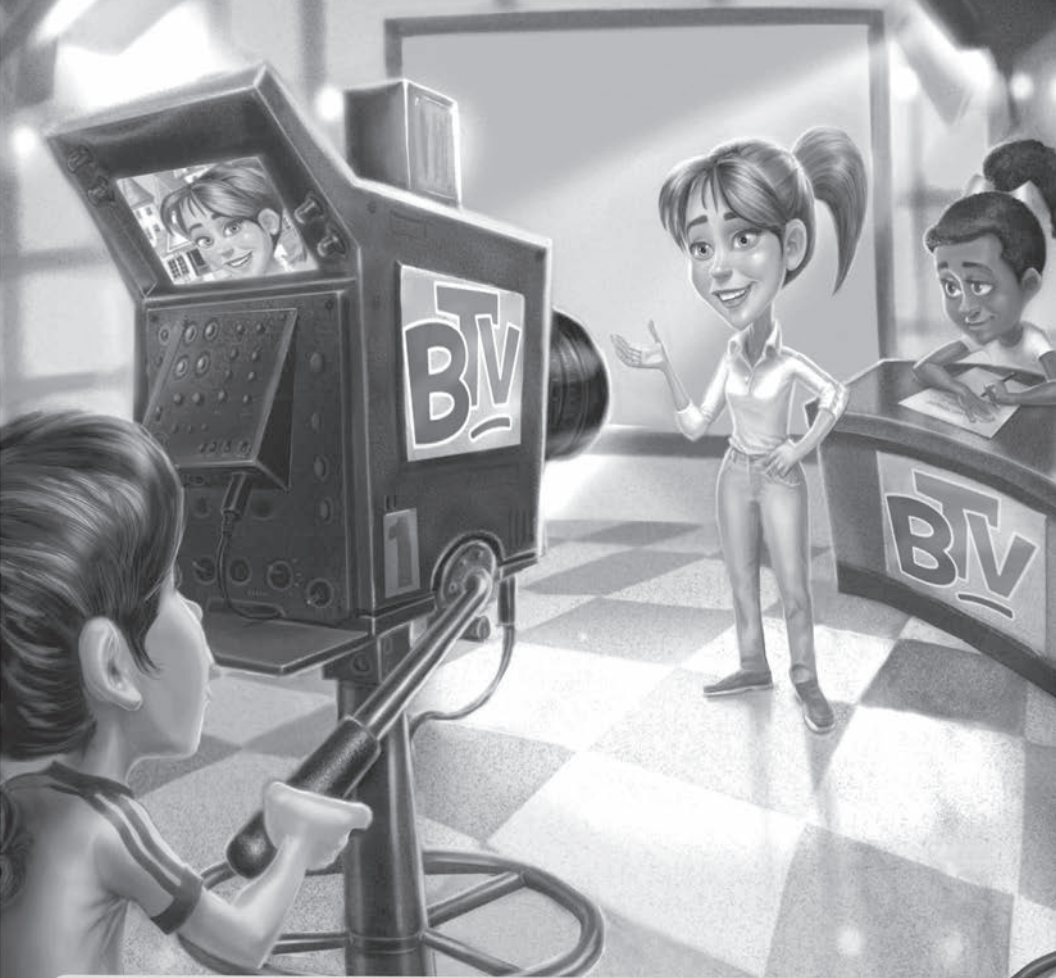


CANDID CONVERSATIONS WITH CONNIE, VOL 3

A GIRL'S GUIDE TO ENTERTAINMENT, BODY IMAGE, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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CANDID CONVERSATIONS WITH CONNIE, VOL 3

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 Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

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A Girl's Guide to Entertainment, Body Image, and Social Media*
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Introduction

How about *Digging for Destruction*?” Camilla asks. “It got great reviews.”

“Seriously?” Tamika says, rolling her eyes. “The movie’s about giant moles out for revenge against mankind.”

Penny slurps her milkshake. “I thought it was possums out for payback.”

“Whatever,” Olivia replies. “Who would want to watch rodents taking over the world? Can’t we see something more romantic—like *Moonlight over Paris*? My Facebook friends have raved about it!”

Emily scans a webpage on her tablet. “But the critics’ reviews have been awful. I mean, it’s about a man who falls in love with a dog washer because she trimmed his poodle so well. Boring.”

“And a poodle isn’t even that hard to trim,” Penny pipes up. “Have you ever tried grooming a llama? Now I could fall in love with someone who could do that.”

“Well, sounds like it’s between a well-trimmed poodle and a malicious mole,” Katrina says.

“Or possum,” Emily adds.

I’m Connie Kendall, and I’m listening to a typical Saturday-night discussion. The conversation might not always be about

revenge-filled rodents or romance spurred on by clipping shears, but it's usually about deciding which movie we're going to watch on our Girls' Movie Night. We always meet at Whit's End to have a snack and discuss which movie to see. After all, a girl can't live on popcorn and Milk Duds alone . . . although that is a pretty good start.

We're crammed into a booth with our smartphones and tablets, checking movie times and reviews. Emily's shooting a selfie. Penny's texting Wooton. Katrina's on some webpage. Camilla and Olivia are looking for recommendations on social-media sites. Tamika's listening to music. And I'm trying to make sure my milkshake doesn't spill all over their devices.

"Can't we just decide on a movie ourselves, instead of going online?" I ask, interrupting the chatter.

The girls look at me blankly.

"I mean, it feels like it should be simpler than all this. I just want to spend time with you guys. I don't need all this . . . noise."

"Sorry, I'll turn down my ringer," Penny says, adjusting her phone.

"Not that kind of noise," I say. "I mean the noise of all this information. Media everywhere giving us news and opinions—like what to wear, watch, and listen to."

"But we're going to a movie," Olivia says. "That's media too."

"I know," I say. "We can't escape it."

“Kinda like the mole that’s taking over the world,” Camilla says. “I mean possum.”

“Well, I think it’s convenient,” Emily says. “I like having reviews and movie times on my phone.”

“I like that too,” I say. “But not when it becomes so consuming. There has to be some kind of balance.”

“Uh, Miss Kendall?” Eugene interrupts as he approaches our booth. “Isn’t your show starting soon?”

I spin around to look at the clock. My talk show *Candid Conversations with Connie* is supposed to start in five minutes!

“But . . . I don’t even know what my topic is,” I blurt.

“I think you might,” Katrina says, pushing her glasses up the bridge of her nose. “You could talk about the media and its influence on us.”

“We could touch on technology, too.” Emily says.

The other girls nod in agreement.

“But I’m not prepared,” I say. “You’re all going to have to help me.”

The girls quickly jump up and parade behind me into the studio.

I think it’s going to be a pretty interesting show. Maybe you’d like to join us!

CHAPTER 1

Chasing a Green-Footed Chipmunk

True Beauty



The movie the girls and I ended up seeing last week was intense. You know the kind . . . You get so drawn in that you reach for a soda and drink half of it before you realize it's not even yours. Then the guy in the next seat glares at you because you just finished off his Dr Pepper. *Oops.* Anyway, the movie starred one of my favorite actresses: the stunning Elsie Briggs.

Elsie is beautiful and talented. In the movie, she played a karate expert and brilliant scientist who marches into the White

House to fight off thirty-seven aliens who have taken over the United States. Her only weapons are her wits and her martial-arts expertise. And you wouldn't believe how she uses a metal spatula to defend herself against the nine-armed monsters.

I sat on the edge of my seat as a final explosion demolished the building, throwing our heroine several hundred feet onto the White House lawn. But just when I thought it was over for poor Elsie, she slowly stood up and brushed herself off. Her hair was adorably disheveled. A cute black smudge streaked her cheek. If anything, fighting aliens only made her look *more* beautiful. Flashing a determined smile, she ran back to the smoke-blackened scene to battle the final alien.

This woman just survived an alien attack and an explosion, and she looked better than I do after half an hour of primping. *Why can't I look like that?* I wondered.

Here's the thing: Elsie Briggs doesn't even look like Elsie Briggs. Nor do any of the musicians, movie stars, or models you see.

Really.

The actresses and models who appear in magazines and on TV screens receive hours of professional beauty treatment. Their faces get contoured with cosmetic shading. Their best features are enhanced. Their hair is colored and highlighted. A stylist teases, curls, and pins the perfect hairstyle. Hairpieces are even added to make their hair appear fuller.

When a model gets on set for a photo shoot, fans and lighting are arranged to create the best possible appearance. Of the hundreds—or even thousands—of photos taken, only the top one is selected and then adjusted using Photoshop. Skin blemishes are erased, eyebrows lifted, cheekbones raised, lips plumped, legs and waistlines minimized. By the time the photo is printed in a magazine, you might not even recognize the model if she stood in line in front of you at the candy store . . . because *she doesn't really look like that*.

So if you had all the money in the world, you could hire a staff of people to make you look movie-star perfect all the time too. But really, how would they all fit in the back of your mom's minivan? And remember: makeup runs and hair goes flat. So your "perfection" would be fake and fleeting.

After the movie, we headed to Whit's End and ended up talking about our desire to look like women who don't exist.

"I'm discouraged," Tamika said, stirring her milkshake. "Even though I know what I'm seeing in movies and magazines isn't real, I still look in the mirror and feel . . . I don't know . . . I'm just not pretty enough."

The other girls murmured that they felt the same way. That made me sad. My friends are beautiful, healthy, vivacious young women like you. They don't need to change their appearance at all! But that's not what the media communicates to them.

Penny fiddled with her napkin. “Yeah, trying to be beautiful is like chasing a green-footed chipmunk.”

All eyes immediately turned to her.

“What was that?” I asked.

She explained . . .



Penny's Story

Last Saturday I spent half the day helping Wooton catch a chipmunk. Wooton had been painting some furniture green—

he's all about going green, y'know—and the chipmunk ran through his paint tray and into his house.

By the time I came over, the little critter had left green footprints all over the kitchen floor, the stairway, and the rocket-shaped shower stall.

“There's nothing harder to catch than a green-footed chipmunk,” Wooton told me as he invited me to join the chase.

I went to the garage, grabbed his fishing net, and

threw myself into catching the little guy. He was so quick and agile that it took us two hours and two pounds of peanuts to finally coax him back outside!

Wooton thought catching a chipmunk was hard, but as I ran around his house, I kept thinking how elusive the world's standard of beauty can be. You can't really keep up with it, and you won't ever catch it—especially in a couple of hours.

Penny made a good point. (I think.) To clarify what she was saying, I asked, “So what’s considered beautiful is always changing?”

“Exactly,” she said. “When I began studying art history, I was struck by the curviness of the women in older paintings. They were a whole lot heavier than the models you see in magazines today. Yet, at that time, *those* were the women considered beautiful. *Those* were the women that others aspired to look like. They looked healthy and full of energy.”

I nodded in agreement. “Isn’t it funny that society’s opinion of beauty doesn’t stay the same?”

Penny smiled. “I can’t wait until scrawny people with pointy elbows and knobby knees become all the rage. Then *I’ll* be a supermodel.”

Changing Standards

A few centuries back, women who were curvy and pale were considered extremely attractive. Thin women were viewed as malnourished servants. Full-figured females appeared wealthy and well fed. Their pale skin meant these women had the privilege of staying inside. Working women toiled in the field, growing tan in the sun.

In the early 1900s, this started to change as working women found themselves indoors, growing pale in factories and offices. Then tanned skin became more desirable.

Trends in fashion and style change more frequently than the ice-cream flavors at Whit's End. The “in” colors switch each season. Pixie hairstyles change to long, flowing waves. Thin, arched eyebrows switch to fuller brows. Natural-look makeup transitions to over-the-top, bold colors. Waiflike arms replace toned, muscular arms as the ideal look.

Trying to chase down the perfect weight, shape, hair color, and eyebrow arch *is* like trying to catch a green-footed chipmunk. It's impossible. Yet most of us strive to become whatever the rest of the world sees as beautiful—even though the “in” look is constantly changing and is often unobtainable.

Here's a Secret . . .

Every woman—no matter how gorgeous she appears to be—wants to change something about herself. That's why women spend \$12 *billion* each year on plastic surgery.¹ They're chasing an impossible ideal that's more difficult to catch than Wooton's green-footed chipmunk.

A girl named Brittany from Scranton, Pennsylvania, recently contacted me after hearing my radio show. I think you'll relate to her question . . .



It feels like you have to be pretty to be well liked or even noticed. I hate all the pressure to be beautiful and skinny. What can I do?
#CandidConversationsWithConnie

We're all victims of the beauty pursuit. And Brittany is right: pretty people get more attention. At some point in your life, a boy will notice you simply because he finds you pretty. Outward appearances *do* matter in the world we live in.

While there's nothing wrong with putting some effort into looking your best, you are far more than what you see in the mirror. At your very core, you need to believe that you're a perfect creation of your heavenly Father. Your value is so much more significant than your weight, your hairstyle, or what you wear. You wouldn't buy a house without touring the inside, even if the exterior was perfect. You wouldn't purchase a red convertible without giving it a test drive to make sure the engine works. What's inside matters *a lot*.

So you have a choice. You can . . .

- A. work hard on having a shiny exterior or
- B. make an effort to build godly character and grow closer to God.

Plenty of people choose A. They might get a lot of attention at first, but when your looks become the priority, things like deep friendships and meaningful conversation can often take a backseat.

When we choose B, we don't worry as much about people's first impressions. We're more interested in having friends who know us well, who enjoy who we are, and who are kind and loyal. We'd rather spend less time on our

hair and more time having fun with friends, getting to know God better, and developing our talents and interests.

Receiving attention for what we wear to school isn't attention that lasts. The Bible says it best (it usually does): "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

My grandmother was a remarkable woman. Her life wasn't always easy. She didn't have a lot of money. She never appeared in movies or on magazine covers. But when she passed away several years ago, her funeral was packed. I'll never forget how many people walked up to me and said, "Your grandma was so beautiful."

I nodded because I knew what they meant. Grandma had wiry, gray hair and a face full of wrinkles and creases. She was a little chunky, and her skin sagged. But she glowed with joy. She loved God and knew He loved her. Her bright eyes shone with wisdom and compassion. Her smile lit up a room. Her laugh made others laugh. She was simply . . . stunning.

Do you like hanging out with your best friend because she has perfectly plucked eyebrows or because she treats you with kindness and stands up for you? Do you like your favorite teacher because she wears the latest hairstyle or because she's funny and encouraging?

The Bible reminds us that beauty isn't an outward quality. True beauty comes from within—from the quality of our spirits. First Peter 3:3-4 (NLT) says,

Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God.

The Bible doesn't forbid us from wearing earrings and styling our hair. It does say to *not be concerned* about those things. Don't fret over looking perfect. Don't use your time standing in front of the mirror preening and primping. Instead, clothe yourself with the beauty that comes from within. That's where we should focus our attention . . . on being beautiful *inside*.

As I read through 1 Peter a few months ago, that verse really impacted me. To be honest, I've struggled with that whole "gentle and quiet" bit. I'm about as quiet and gentle as a camel in a glass museum. So I memorized that verse and tried living it out in my actions.

One day I went into Whit's End and hardly said a word. It nearly killed me. I had stories I wanted to tell,

songs I wanted to sing, and questions I wanted to ask. I bit my tongue so much to keep from blurting things out that it swelled to three times its normal size. Finally, when I thought I would absolutely explode (and it was only ten in the morning!), Whit asked me, “What’s wrong? Why are you being so quiet today?”

So I told him about the verse.

Do you know what he did? He *laughed*.

“Connie,” he said, “the word *quiet* in that verse actually means ‘peaceful.’ A woman who is at peace doesn’t argue, gossip, start fights, or complain. She spreads life and goodness, like you do when you interact with the kids and tell your stories. Sometimes peace can sound a lot like loud laughter.”

“Really?” I said. “So do you think I’m beautiful on the inside?”

Whit smiled. “Connie, I think your insides are stunning.”

Thankfully I had the rest of the day to make up for my quiet morning. Even with my swollen tongue, I managed to get in my daily allotment of words. And I’ll never forget Whit’s words to me.

Outward beauty is fleeting. Your youthful appearance is temporary. And no matter how pretty you are, it will only take you so far. Beauty matters just a bit. It’s like the cherry

on the sundae. You might notice it when Whit hands you a treat across the counter, but ultimately the chocolate, caramel, and ice cream matter a whole lot more. Oh . . . and the whipped cream. That's the life-changing part. (Suddenly I'm feeling really hungry.)

Anyway, I don't want to settle for outside beauty that only the world can see. I want to be beautiful . . . for *God*. I want others to see His grace and compassion through me. I want God to be honored by and reflected in my beauty.

Your Turn

What part of yourself do you find the most beautiful? Your eyes, your hair, or your strong legs might be the first things that come to mind. But don't forget about the characteristics that make you beautiful on the inside. Are you a joy spreader? Do you pray for your friends? Are you compassionate and kind? Do you help people in need? Do you make a point to give others encouragement and compliments? Write down these qualities, too! This

exemplifies your true beauty! (If you need more ideas, read through 1 Corinthians 13 and Galatians 5.)

My best beauty qualities:

