

Melissa:

Thank you so much for doing this. I appreciate it so much. And knowing the books that you have written some of your ministry with women, it just feels like a great fit. And I'm excited to hear your thoughts on this topic.

Stasi:

Thanks. I love what you're doing. It's so important.

Melissa:

Well thank you so much. The first thing that I love to ask people about is just how do you define beauty?

Stasi:

Can I tell a story that answers that a little bit?

Melissa:

Yes, please do. That'd be great.

Stasi:

I am a new grandma and I've been a grandmother for three and a half years, but we had a new edition last week. He is eight days old and I got to be there. Watching my daughter in law labor, and in the room with her when she gave birth, it was just stunning, but watching her labor was breathtaking.

And then after she delivered, which was holy, we sang the doxology to welcome him.

But the next day we were sitting in bed and she began to bless her body. "I bless you, my postpartum body, I bless my hormones. I bless my stretch marks."

The whole experience of her. I had just done my hair. She said, "you are beautiful, mom." And I said, "you are beauty," because how she embraced it all. She embraced the pain that goes with childbirth.

And for all women, we may or may not have born children ourselves, but we bring forth life. We bring forth life into a world that is hurting and that is hard.

And then to watch her bless her body, which is not the way that it looked in the past and probably not the way it's going to look in the future. But the fact that she's embracing all that she is and inviting God into the moment of where she is. That she's fully expressing her, femininity, her strength, her, everything that was stunningly beautiful to me.

Melissa:

Wow. And such a flip of our cultural ideas around birth. And I mean, that's, amazing. That's a really moving, counter-cultural act.

Stasi:

It really is because you get pictures now, anywhere “four weeks after birth, or it's only been, two months” and she's got this flat belly because she's been working out for six hours today or some other absurd, high pressure thing.

What is held up as beauty in our culture, as you know, is out of reach really for about 99% of the population, physically. But then if it's just absurd, it's almost well, no, it is. It's cruel. It's saying “this is what beauty and spend a lot of money to obtain this. Work really hard. You're never going to get there; however, you should try really, hard and you should fail, but you should still continue to try.”

The whole definition that you are so familiar with is so skewed and to go counter culturally, because the realm of beauty is so much deeper than what we see is it's, in who we are. And when we embrace who we are and the totality, we become something quite lovely.

Melissa:

The other thing I love about what you're... did you say is that your daughter or your daughter in law who had the baby?

Stasi:

She's my daughter in law, but she's really a daughter. I really don't like the “in law.” If you adopted a child, you don't call your child “adopted.” She's my daughter.

Melissa:

I like that. I haven't heard that, but I do like that. Because “daughter-in-law” doesn't or “mother-in-law” haven't really, those terms seem a bit distant.

Stasi:

They are distant.

Melissa:

Oftentimes when we think about beauty and our bodies, we think about those flat abs or the whatever on the front of the magazine, but really thinking about the complexity of childbirth and like you just had a human come from nothing, but, and we're going to talk about how your body should...I mean, put these constraints on whatever the six weeks after, or that's going to be the miracle we talk about and not the actual miracle, miracle in quotes, by the way, for those listening versus the miracle of life. And that's a really moving...I'm going to sit with that image.

Stasi:

Yeah, I'm going to really live with that because our world says that measurements...like we can measure beauty, they even have things out now where they measure beauty on the face, like how the eyes and the nose and the forehead spread.

And it's so absurd because, how do you measure the beauty of a sunset? Or how do you measure the beauty that you experience when you are welcomed into an embrace of someone who is safe? A true beauty, the depth of who we are and what we offer and what we invite others in, that's what's beautiful. And we all know it when we're in the presence of it.

And, yes, there is beauty to form and feature. There is and we bless that, but we've got to widen the spectrum of what it is.

Melissa:

That's so good. Another thing I like to ask people is just where you see beauty in the world. I mean, you've named several places, but on that note of wanting to widen it, I love just to ask people, where else are you seeing beauty these days?

Stasi:

I can see, and we can, all, see beauty everywhere. We are surrounded by it. We have an extravagant, generous God who has just scattered it all around the universe.

In the evenings, I can smell it in the air and I can hear it. And we have an owl that just has come...so glad he's back. And then in the stars.

We are exiting winter and in Colorado Springs, we really don't have spring. It's really just a wrestling match between winter and summer. And today it's May 12th, but winter is winning. Going out this morning, really early, was ensconced in fog. This mist, I was in a cloud and it was beautiful. And then the dots of the water on the windshield were so pretty, the way they were reflecting, just the light. Snowflakes on windshields. Just beautiful. I love flowers. You're not supposed to plant here until May 15th.

Melissa:

Okay.

Stasi:

And with all that we're living through right now, I could not wait. I needed tangible, fragrant, beauty that I could see. I have planted several pots of an abundance of flowers and they're stunning. Those are just a few, but they are all over the place.

Melissa:

One of the things that always is interesting to contend with, at least for me, and I think you maybe touched upon this in your book, *Defiant Joy* a little bit, but just in the midst of this broken world, that we're a part of, we also have this beauty at the same time, both of these co-occurring experiences. And, so, it's something I love to ask people about is, have you had a particular experience of brokenness we're in the midst of that brokenness, you saw beauty breaking in?

Stasi:

Oh, absolutely. Here's what I think of right away is I've had two hip replacements and the first one...the pain, I didn't know what it was. And I was in my fifties, it's not like that's kind of

normal where your hip would run out. Doctors didn't think that's what it was. And I was doing physical therapy for six months and I got to the point where I couldn't walk. I was using a cane for a long time, but I got to the point where I couldn't walk. And then we discovered what it was... finally got an MRI. It was awful. It was really a ton of pain.

And then I had the surgery, which, because I had left it for so long, it took a longer to recover. But for the first 30 days I'm sitting in a chair and the first week I need help going to the bathroom. After that I need help showering and sitting on the chair and having my hair washed. And I literally was so completely dependent on my husband who was stunningly beautiful to me. I'd have to wake him up...at least the first couple of nights, like three times a night. And he was never “ugh” and he was sweet and he went quickly around.

And it was humbling to just have somebody have to help you down to a toilet and pick you back up and get you over and, then manage the pain. And then I didn't do well with drugs and broke out in this terrible rash. I was in the midst of suffering. The hip lasted for about a year and a half, and then it was another year and a half recovery.

And it was such a taste for me of what people live with because I haven't lived with chronic pain. And I also knew I was going to get better. I was the wheelchair gal, I was in the wheelchair club at the airports. The care that I received from everyone, but particularly from my husband was overwhelming and such a balm and an aid to healing because I didn't feel like, I never got this was “speed it up” or “you're a burden.”

I got kindness. And, that kindness, that was just stunning to me.

Melissa:

Thank you for sharing that. That's very powerful.

I've just been thinking about this too. About, I think sometimes as women, at least I know I'm a people pleaser, I want to be kind and good, to be “perfect” or whatever, but I've been thinking about actually how there is actually a depth to something like kindness. There is eternity to kindness. It has a weight to it.

And I think when we're, when I'm offering kindness or someone's offering kindness in love, there is power to that, versus I'm just trying to be, a nice, woman or a nice girl. I've just been thinking about, character traits like that...virtues, how there is eternity to virtues like that.

Stasi:

Yes. And the weight and the impact and that you can't measure. And it can be the smallest thing.

Now, when we're out, we can only smile with our eyes in most places, but you can feel that you can hear it with the tone of voice. You can ask somebody, “how is your day going?” and, offer kindness. And, it makes a big difference, especially in these days, because if you're at a store I've, heard, my husband was at a grocery store that we've gone to for 20 years.

When you go all the time, you learn who those people are. And one of the people, he has a relationship with the checkout gal. He asked how she was doing. And she said, “this is really tough on my humanity.”

She had a time where she needed to communicate with a person and they couldn't understand her through the mask. So, she just lifted it down and spoke and a person like two people back just yelled at her, “put your mask on” and it was so mean. And I understand people have a lot of fear right now, but to offer kindness in the midst of that, it's weighty, like beauty it's weighty.

Melissa:

Yes. Thank you. You already touched on the next question, but what, what lies have you come across when it comes to beauty in your own life? What kind of lies have you come across?

Stasi:

There are so many. They are particularly harsh on women. I mean men suffer them too, but we hear, and I have heard the lie, that beauty it's all external and I have failed in the external beauty department.

What the lie is then is if I'm not a certain weight, because I've struggled with my weight for 30 years, if I'm not at a certain place, then not only am I not beautiful, but I'm failing as a woman. Like, it is the defining thing over my life, my appearance.

And that's hooey. That is, I mean, I'm using a very mild word, but you can imagine. So, just that. And I share that with so many women and women of all sizes. I work with a number of gorgeous women and to a woman, they have struggled with their weight and they are normal weighted women. They're right within the realms. And I look at them and go, “I have no idea what you're talking about, but I understand that it's real to you.” I try to be kind.

But then, the whole thing...that that's my complete identity that I'm failing as a woman, I'm failing as a human being, if I don't fit in a certain size. That's really mean.

Where a lot of times I also would just say the cruelest things to myself, when I passed a mirror, I would hear, “I hate you” or “you're so ugly.”

And it's very hard when you are...my dog is barking... underneath that to offer to other people, to come out of your own shame and, offer the goodness of who you are and what we're meant to offer. And, so, what comes then is “you don't have anything to offer. I have nothing to offer because I am not a size eight or a twelve, or whatever.”

The thing about feeling like I'm failing as a woman if I'm not a certain size or look a certain way, or my hair isn't this way, or my complexion isn't clear... you name it, or my teeth aren't enough or they're not straight or blah-blah-blah is that the world reinforces that.

Melissa:

Yes.

Stasi:

And says, you know, that's really true.

And it is also interesting in that at my heaviest, I've been able to compare...my heaviest in 30 years or my lowest in 30 years, honestly, the way people treat me is different. I mean, it's, real. And to combat that and to grow as a woman, I'm now in my sixties.

To grow into finally knowing that beauty is an awakened heart. Beauty is a depth of spirit and it is true, that as I've grown to know more how loved I am, not for what I look like, but for who I am, the more beautiful I become.

Melissa:

That's wonderful. For, those listening and, for me, for all of us, what has been helpful for you as you've confronted those, lies that our culture is reeling not us, all, day long really?

Stasi:

Well, the thing that has helped me is I'm asking God how he sees me. There is a reflection that I want to see, and it's not in the mirror. It's not in the window when I pass the store. It's in His eyes.

I was out one-night, walking. I had three young boys at the time and it was a beautiful night. And, it was one of those nights when my husband got home from work. And I said, "tag, you're it. And I'm out of here." I went for a walk and which was better for everybody because I really felt I was failing as a mother that day. And the truth was I was failing as a mother that day. I'm not a failure, but it wasn't a great day.

So, I went for this walk and the stars were stunning that night. And I began to compliment God and what a great job he did. But just literally I was saying, "well done on the stars."

I heard him say in my heart, "I'm glad you like it, my darling." And then I went "say, what?" Is that okay that I heard you call me that? And it was because later on I looked in Song of Songs and I opened it up that night and it said, "how beautiful you are my darling."

And it really spoke to my heart that in the midst of a place where I wasn't living in the way that I wanted to be living, I certainly wasn't loving in the way I wanted to be loving. But even in that place and being morbidly obese at the time, he said, "how beautiful you are, my darling." And this was about 25 years ago. And it was the beginning of a shift to ask him, "how do you see me?"

And there are scriptures that say, "man looks at the outward appearance. God looks at the heart." And it didn't diminish my desire to be attractive, but it diminished that being...if I measured up to my own expectations and desires or not, I could rest in the fact that the truth is I'm a beautiful woman and I have not met a woman who isn't. I mean, every single woman that I have met, a variety of ages or skin color or any of it, size, it's so transcendent and it's so quality of spirit and it's so how you feel in her presence.

So, for me to begin to turn what I experienced with other women onto myself, that's the challenge. I think everybody who's listening knows that sometimes we speak to ourselves in ways that we would never speak to another human being.

And I'm growing in stopping doing that. Just like it started with my daughter in law, blessing her body. She wasn't looking at her body going, "Ooh, just a little bit, listen, I'm going to lose the weight," like "we're going to get there."

No, it was in this moment, I bless my maternal body. I'm going to care for you. And that changes everything. It really does.

I began to bless my own body when I would go, "Oh, I hate my arms," those are my particular thing that I don't like about myself. And to begin to say, "I bless you, arms. I bless you. You have helped me carry things and lift things and do all kinds of things. And thank you." So that's been helpful.

I rambled there. I don't think I even answered your question.

Melissa:

It was so good, so helpful. Thank you.

The next question I like to ask is if there have been experiences that have transformed your ideas around beauty, and I feel you, kind of answered it, but maybe does anything else come to mind that has been transformational for you in your views.

Stasi:

I tell this story at our *Captivating* events of speaking at a marriage retreat and I'm there with John and we're speaking some, but I'm also getting to partake of the other things. And there was a couple there that the woman was so beautiful to me that, I mean her laugh and the way she looked at her husband, the way she did her hair, the clothes she wore, she was just, and I, just began following her around. I was supposed to be there with John, but this woman.

I was about 40 years old. She was about 75 years old. And, it hit me that it takes that long to get that beautiful.

And that was transformational for me to go, because I'm not kidding. She's stunning. And her heart was alive and she loved her husband. She loves her God. And she lived in a world like you and I, she shared with me, her grandson who was, dying of leukemia.

And she gave me his picture, of this precious little eight year old boy, surrounded by baby ducks and just, her a request to have different people pray for him. It wasn't like, "Oh, she had her heart alive and awake and she hadn't numbed yourself or lived in resignation and despair because her life was smooth."

No, it was a choice that she had made to stay alive and to continue to offer and to see beauty and see that truth and beauty and goodness really do have the final say that life wins.

Not destruction, not sorrow, not pain. Those are things [that] are real, but those are not the canopy under which we live. That, changed everything, I went, “okay, this doesn't have to do with anything that the world-“

Melissa:

That's so powerful. Thank you.

Okay. I also like to ask people if there was one thing that you wish people knew about beauty, what would that be?

Stasi:

That they are beautiful. That they bear it uniquely because they are an image of the living God, and God is nothing if not beautiful. And that it literally is something so deeper than can be measured.

The world says that our beauty diminishes with age and that couldn't be further from the truth. And, literally, because we do grow in it. As we pursue God, as we pursue healing, as we pursue knowing, get this into the fiber of my being, that I would know that I am loved every single moment of my life. It will shift things. It shifts the ground we're standing on.

I mean, even those that are listening, ask God to show you your beauty, ask him what he thinks of you. He wants you to know, and it's, better than you think.

Melissa:

Stacy, you are incredibly inspirational. This has been really your words are so powerful. Thank you for sharing them.

Stasi:

Thank you.

Melissa:

So, obviously you have written about this. You've spoken about this. Is there anything else that I haven't specifically asked about that, that you'd like to share about beauty?

Stasi:

Is this, podcast, did they see you?

Melissa:

No.

Stasi:

Okay. Then they should know how lovely you are. Because, looking at you. I mean, your eyes, you're just conveying mercy and such kindness to me, and then your questions, and then your

countenance. And, they can hear it. They can hear it in your voice. They hear it in your conversation and let them, those are listening know that.

And I've said it before that, I want them to know that they possess it. And they just said, "not me." A lot of people just said, "not me." You see it people, but it's really hard to make it true for yourself. Even, to say that God loves me. Well, God loves everybody else, but for you to say, "no, I'm going to take this for me."

What I would want to say is try it on, just try it on for 15 minutes and start replaying the tapes in your head and start saying, "I am beautiful." I'm guessing it's primarily women that are listening to say, "I am a beautiful woman." Okay. I can feel even the pushback that's going to be happening because I know this. I know it in myself. And I know it in women that I've shared this with, but there is a shift that happens if you just consider the possibility and try it on, because what difference does it make? It actually makes all the difference in the world.

If you believe for yourself, then people will believe it of themselves while they're in your presence.

Melissa:

Thank you so much.

Stasi:

Melissa, thank you for having me.

Melissa:

You're so welcome. I'm so drawn in. And are you and John's still doing the *Captivating* events then through *Ransomed Heart*?

Stasi:

Well, with this pandemic, we've actually had to cancel our October event, which is sad to me. But, we do a lot of online offerings. We have a Facebook page at John Eldredge and *Ransomed Heart*. We're sharing stuff every day. I have a Stasi Eldredge Facebook page and we're doing some Zoom offerings and things like that. And we look forward to being able to, to offer some more in the future when we figure out the creative ways that we can do that.

Melissa:

Yes, and for people who are, drawn in by what you've shared, can I just say a couple, I just want to share the book titles with.

Stasi:

Thank you. Yes.

Melissa:

Defiant Joy is one... I'll let you speak about your own books. If, that's okay. You can say a couple of things or whatever you want to say about what would be helpful references if people want to hear more from you on some of these topics.

Stasi:

I think a great place to start is with the book *Captivating*. It's talking about a woman's soul and the unique way that she bears the image of God. And there's a couple of chapters there on beauty that really unpack it and the weight of it. And that's a good place to start.

For those that are married, we wrote *Love and War*. And I wrote a book called *Becoming Myself, Embracing God's Dream of You*. And that, that really goes more into the tangible aspects of beauty and into the unique, particular way that God has created us. That book also goes into blessing our femininity and in taking a look at our relationship with our mothers, which is a varied relationship, depending on who you are. And then *Defiant Joy*, which is about standing against the world's tide and possessing joy in the midst of a life that can be marked by intense suffering. I think that's it.

Melissa:

Oh my goodness. And such important profound topics too, to write on. Thank you for offering those well, Stasi, this has been such, a pleasure meeting you and hearing your ideas on this. I'm excited to share this interview with people.

Stasi:

Thanks, Melissa.