



[your identity in a selfie world]

face time

kristen hatton

“Kristen has offered Christian girls and young women a rich, gospel-saturated gift in this book! She blends biblical theology and the story of redemption with frank and realistic engagement with today’s youth culture and its dangers, and does so conversationally and winsomely. As a pastor/chaplain to high school and college students for the last ten years and now a father to daughters of my own, I commend this book to you as a solid resource for guiding young women toward an unshakeable identity that is grounded in the promises of a good and gracious God.”

Jon Nielson, Author of *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry* and *Faith That Lasts: Raising Kids Who Don’t Leave the Church*

“*Face Time* offers an age-old solution to a current crisis. Today’s teenagers are the first generation of people to live their entire life with exposure to social media. Today’s parents are the first to have to consider how to handle the new challenges that technology is presenting. At the end of the day, the underlying problems come down to the same, eternal human problem: our desire to manufacture our own worth and build our own righteousness. Kristen Hatton offers a wise, smart, and helpful direction on how the gospel of grace offers comfort, freedom, and life in light of these issues. This book is a life-line for so many people who experience fear and desperation around these issues.”

Cameron Cole, Chairman of Rooted: Advancing Grace-Driven Ministry; director of youth ministries, Cathedral Church of the Advent, Birmingham, AL; coeditor, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*

“Our sense of identity guides the many conscious and unconscious decisions we make. It’s the lens through which we see the world. So it shouldn’t be a shock that when our sense of identity becomes unhealthy, our life has a tendency to follow. Each chapter of *Face Time* gives us an insight into a specific lie that can infiltrate our identity and damage our sense of self. When we are able to root out these lies and get to the truth that lies beneath, we are on the path to a happier, healthier life.”

Jonathan Steingard, Lead singer for Hawk Nelson

“As a woman, mom, friend, and former teenage girl herself, Kristen Hatton understands the intense pressure and devastating effects of trying to measure up in a constantly changing culture. With compassion and clarity, she offers wisdom that is deeply rooted in God’s Word and God’s character. She offers practical help and real hope as she shows the reader how to find the freedom that comes only through an identity in Christ.”

Courtney Doctor, Director of Women’s Ministry at Kirk of the Hills, PCA; author of *From Garden to Glory*

“The depression rate in teens has been linked to the ever-increasing usage of social media, making *Face Time* most timely in the realm of both Christian and professional counseling. Kristen’s book provides spiritual depth and truth to addictive behaviors like body image, eating disorders, and self-injury that plague hurting adolescents and adults alike. It’s time to turn off the screen and dive into a book that reminds the soul of its true identity and worth.”

Alice H. Churnock, Licensed Professional Counselor;
Certified Eating Disorder Specialist

“Kristen’s words offer a ‘me too’ for young women to know and understand that they aren’t the only ones who deal with the comparison game that social media often presents. She breathes life into the identity of young women and reminds them that no amount of likes, comments, or validation through Instagram can satisfy the way the fierce love of the Lord can!”

MacKenzie Wilson, Founder and Creative Director,
Delight Ministries

“As a mom with two girls, one in middle school and one in college, Kristen’s fresh perspective brings hope to the struggles girls experience from our social media and selfie-driven world. Through the constant struggles of inadequacy, distorted desires, and obsession with appearance and performance, *Face Time: Your Identity in a Selfie World*, offers girls a gospel-centered solution to the ‘identity crisis’ currently consuming our distracted and disconnected culture. Kristen equips young believers with the truth of God’s acceptance and encourages them to embrace who he created them to be in Christ Jesus. Her personal experiences and creative illustrations will captivate and inspire girls to look *up* to Jesus rather than looking at all that surrounds them. Thank you, Kristen, for impacting this generation of girls for Jesus. I can’t wait to get a copy for my girls!”

Annie Pajcic, Founder of ThouArtExalted Ministries,
www.thouartexalted.com

“Kristen Hatton’s passion to see the beauty and freedom of Jesus’s sacrifice grow in the hearts of teenage girls couldn’t possibly be more evident. Clearly a labor of love, *Face Time* invites teenagers to engage their lives with an idolatry and identity framework rooted in the gospel. Hatton provides realistic and relatable stories for girls to

find themselves in and offers insightful questions to help them exegete their lives and culture.”

Liz Edrington, Coordinator of Girls’ Discipleship and Young Adults at North Shore Fellowship; counselor at Summit Counseling Center, Chattanooga, TN

“As a father of teens, I often feel overwhelmed and ill-equipped with the changes that social media is making in our everyday lives. Kristen Hatton has provided a huge dose of information, wisdom, and gospel-oriented encouragement in this book. I highly recommend it.”

Michael Horton, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Theology, Westminster Seminary California; author of *Core Christianity*; cohost of the *White Horse Inn*

“We’ve long since passed a time when socialization of our children was the limited domain of families, churches, and schools. By their teenage years our children face an array of influences, not the least being the pervasive and growing impact of social media. Kristen Hatton has written a wise, winsome, and biblically informed road map to help girls navigate an online culture that can create enormous pressure and anxiety. Highly recommended.”

Tom Cannon, National Coordinator, Reformed University Fellowship

“As I read *Face Time*, I thought of adult women I’ve discipled who’ve struggled with similar pain and sin as the teen girls highlighted in this book. How might their faith and lives have been impacted had they read *Face Time* when they were younger? I recommend this book for every ‘little woman’ and those who love and disciple them. *Face Time* is the gospel-filled, wisdom-rich book I’ve longed to see written!”

Ellen Dykas, Women’s Ministry Director, Harvest USA; author of *Sexual Sanity for Women: Healing from Sexual and Relational Brokenness* and *Sex and the Single Girl: Smart Ways to Care for Your Heart*

FACE TIME

Your Identity in a Selfie World

Kristen Hatton



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DEDICATION

To my precious little nieces: Cate, Linley, and Margaret,

May the present joy of your childhoods be preserved
through knowing your infinite value and true identity,
secure in the work and worth of Christ for you.

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Foreword

I remember being a teenage girl. Yes, it was a long, long time ago but I do remember. I remember the angst, the insecurity, and the pain. I remember sitting in my parents' bedroom, crying to my mom about feeling left out, feeling less than all the other girls. Those feelings plague me even now, but to a lesser degree, praise God. (Although my mom still has to listen to me when they mount a sneak attack.)

I have a teenage daughter. I see those same feelings making an unwelcome appearance in her life as well. I recognize their mark with every heartbreak, every downcast look. Being a teenage girl is harder now than it has ever been. Social media, while not evil in and of itself, has raised the stakes and made the temptations to angst, insecurity, and pain a click away. While those temptations raged in social settings when I was a teenager, I could go home, where they didn't follow me—there was a break from the siren call. But now there is no break. Now the siren calls day and night from smart phones and computers. Our girls are in the fight for their lives. Their identity is threatened at every turn. The fight for each of us to find where we fit in this world is a grueling one that will not end until we see Jesus face to face. We need weapons for the battle. We need hope to go on. We need courage to face another day when the same fears beleaguer us. Our only hope is the gospel, the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The news that our identity doesn't have to be tied up in how we look, how we perform, or how we have

failed to perform. This message isn't just relevant for teenage girls, but for everyone reading this book.

We are all—every one of us, from grandmother to teenage girl—looking to find our identity, our place. The real problems come when we fail at this endeavor—and mind my words when I say that, outside of Christ, we will *always* fail at this endeavor. When we forget the gospel (or perhaps we have never heard how Christ's work has changed everything for us), we will end up despairing or proud. When our misplaced hope for identity building is revealed as the faulty savior that it is, where do we turn? Where do our girls turn? When any one of us doesn't get the likes or the comments we wanted, either on social media or IRL, where do we turn to find comfort and hope? Sometimes we double down on our efforts to look prettier or more capable; sometimes we give up completely, sinking headlong into depression; and sometimes we pursue pleasure in the tangible.

The road to self-salvation is always a road to self-destruction. We must have an identity gifted to us. We must have something outside ourselves to save us. Only God himself is able to take all of our efforts to clean ourselves up and show us how worthless they are and yet, at the same time, show us how valuable we are to him. He has loved us with an everlasting love, before we ever did anything right or wrong. Only God himself is able to take all of our desperate attempts to anesthetize the pain of not being good enough and gently lift our faces to him. He causes his face to shine upon us and give us peace.

Kristen Hatton understands the importance of helping our girls find their identity in that good news. She understands it so well that she has poured her heart into these pages. She is a mom to three teenagers and has watched grace transform her parenting and her children's lives. Throughout the pages of this book, you will be shocked at how the gospel really does apply to every situation. Like a skillful surgeon, she delves into situation after situation that a teenage girl might encounter



and applies the healing balm of the gospel. The really excellent part is she doesn't just dress the wounds and send you away, happily ignorant of how she did it. She shows *you* how to dress the wounds of false identity as well. I am grateful to walk and work alongside her.

My encouragement to you, as you read this book with your teenage daughter or with a girl you are mentoring, is that you would not just apply the gospel to her life, but that you would apply it to yourself. My prayer is that you and whoever you read this book with would grow in your obsession for Jesus. If you are a teenage girl who has picked up this book on your own, be prepared to have your life changed and your eyes opened to the beauty of Jesus Christ, your friend, your brother, and your Savior, who gave himself up for you to redeem you.

Jessica Thompson





Introduction

When I get a lot of comments, likes, or re-tweets on a picture or post, I feel . . .

Special. Supreme. Better. Popular. Proud.

When my pictures or posts don't get the responses I desire, I feel . . .

Upset. Disappointed. Worried no one likes me. Not as interesting, witty, or pretty. Ugly. Lonely. Not Cool. Deflated. Like I should delete it because it isn't good enough.

The reason I feel like I don't measure up to my friends is because . . .

Their personalities, looks, and talents overshadow mine. My life seems so boring. They are prettier, skinnier, or richer.

In my opinion, the biggest issues teens are faced with are . . .

Pressure to be perfect. Judgment. Trying to measure up. Stress.

To cope with stress, depression, or the way I am feeling, I have . . .

Binged. Purged. Restricted food. Abused alcohol. Used tobacco or drugs. Cut or burned myself. Been sexually active. *I cannot talk to my friends about these things because . . .*

I don't want them to know I'm struggling or feeling that insecure.

I cannot talk to my parents about these things because . . .

They won't understand. They will get mad at me. I don't want them to worry.

If these comments resonate with you, you are definitely not alone. These are just a sampling of the responses made by teenage girls to questions in an informal, online survey I developed to understand the effects of social media.

Whether it's Instagram, SnapChat, Twitter, Facebook or whatever new platform takes their place, social media constantly exposes you to what others are doing, how they look, and who they are with. For many habitual users of social media, this quickly leads down the destructive path of feeling less-than, as if they don't measure up to those around them. As the pressure to be perfect mounts and their own perceived failures are magnified, it doesn't take much to fall prey to self-pity, discontent, and depression. Even if this is not your experience, it's unlikely that you have escaped the comparison game completely. Perhaps you find yourself on the other end of the spectrum, feeling as if you are winning the comparison competition because of how you look, what you have, or who you hang out with. But that has traps of its own, and you may have encountered some of them already.

I came up with the online survey when I discovered how social media had contributed to my own daughter's false sense of worth. To be honest, I was caught off guard when I learned about her intense struggles with inadequacy. She'd always come across as confident, beautiful, popular, and successful. When I discovered that she felt like she was anything but that, it made me wonder if others who looked like they had it all together felt the same way she did.

My survey was informal and not associated with any scientific study. But as responses from other teenage girls came in, it confirmed that my daughter was not alone in her struggle. I was blown away by the number of teenage girls across the country, from big cities and small towns, in public school, private school, and home school environments, who expressed similar sentiments. I was filled with sadness, not just about the way technology does so much to encourage a distracted,



disconnected culture, but about the deeper problems at the root of the more visible struggles that teenagers (and adults) experience.

Not feeling secure, valued, worthy, loved, accepted, or understood has led teenagers (and adults) to seek security, value, worth, love, and acceptance in sources that can never fully satisfy—nor are they meant to. Many of the things we try in order to feel better about ourselves lead nowhere and often only intensify our struggle. But when we are seeking to find our identity in them, it's hard to turn away. The responses that teenage girls shared with me confirmed that a lot of problem behaviors have their roots in an identity crisis.

As a Christian, I believe that only Jesus can provide the deep security, value, worth, love, and acceptance we all long for. But I know that it's sometimes hard to see what that looks like and how to find it. That is why I've written this book. If you've been struggling with an identity crisis of your own—and maybe some behaviors and thoughts that intensify it—I hope you will find great hope in reading it. I hope, first, that you'll see you are not alone and, second, that you'll discover how to rest in your true identity, found only in him.

Part I shows how the foundation of our brokenness goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. From then on, all humanity has been searching to be filled and made right. So, no matter what you are going through, you are not alone. Your struggles may look different from the next person's, but all of us have hearts that are lost, wandering, and wishing for more.

Jesus saw all the brokenness that came through Adam and Eve and came to earth to heal our hearts and make things right. He entered into our humanness, so he understands what we go through; in fact, he suffers alongside us. He is a God of compassion, who loves us despite our mess, despite the choices we've made that have made things worse, despite our failures and the ways we've done wrong. He loved us so much that he was willing to experience his Father's rejection at the



cross, so that he could take the punishment our sins deserved and his perfection could be credited to us. The cross of Jesus is where we find our security, true value and worth, real comfort, and ultimate contentment. I'll show you how those two things fit together.

After seeing who Jesus is for us and how that impacts who we are and how we see ourselves, Part II will show how these truths apply to some common issues that teen girls struggle with. You may relate to some of the stories yourself, while you may recognize others as the struggles of a friend. Each chapter is meant to help you figure out where the girl in the story has missed the connection between her struggles and the promises that God has made to her through the gospel. You'll think about how her situation would change if she better understood her identity in Christ. Ultimately, Part II is meant to help expose the empty things that are so easy to trust in as sources of security and life—false saviors, really—and lead you to trust more fully in the One who truly is life. And as you understand these struggles better, I think it will increase your compassion for those around you.

This book can be read on your own or adapted for a small group study. Discussing the chapters, stories, and questions with others in a safe environment may help you take in the truths in a deeper way. Whether you are currently treading water emotionally, sinking under the weight of your struggles, or trying to soar in your own strength, my prayer for you is that this book will help you see your need for the good news of Jesus Christ. When you see who he is and what he has done for you, you can experience who you are with confidence, peace, and contentment.



PART I:



Your True Identity

Chapter 1

Our Selfie World Reality



Meredith is well known and well liked in her large high school. She plays volleyball, serves as an officer in Student Council and the Honor Society, and still manages to babysit for several families who adore her. On top of that, she looks gorgeous and is always beautifully dressed. Ask anyone who knows her: She is perfect.

So when Meredith talked about her life at a large student ministry retreat, her peers were stunned to learn that an intense struggle with self-image had led her down the path to an eating disorder.

How could Meredith have struggled with her self-worth when she had everything going for her?

This was Holly's question as she listened to Meredith speak. Holly struggled with the same things, but she'd assumed that someone like Meredith would never have the problems she did. After all, her family life was nothing like Meredith's, and she wasn't nearly as pretty, popular, or involved at school. Although she was a little nervous to confide in someone she barely knew, Holly decided to text Meredith to thank her for sharing what she did and to share her own struggles. Because each was willing to be vulnerable, a new, unexpected friendship blossomed between the two girls.

As Emma scrolled through her social media feed Sunday evening, she felt more and more depressed. In every picture her friends were literally perfect. Why couldn't she be them? Her life was so boring compared to theirs. Besides seeing plans she had been left out of, she also noticed how many

more “comments” and “likes” everyone else received on their photos. “I need to delete my post,” Emma thought. “I’ll just look like a loser if I don’t get more ‘likes.’”

Caroline was scrolling through social media that same Sunday night after a full weekend of fun. She couldn’t decide which of her pictures to post; she wanted to make sure it wasn’t the same one another friend had already posted. But she needed to decide quickly, as she knew it was important to post at just the right time to get the most “likes.” Typically, she got hundreds within minutes, which gave her great satisfaction. She loved the attention and had become dependent on it for self-confidence boosts.

For Emma and Caroline, social media was the way they determined how they compared to their peers. While their experiences were different, their hearts were the same. They both desperately wanted to know they were okay.

Can you relate?

Have you experienced feelings like Meredith’s, Holly’s, Emma’s, or Caroline’s?

Do you find yourself comparing yourself to others, trying to determine where you measure up and where you don’t?

Have you felt isolated or alone, thinking that your parents wouldn’t understand and your friends don’t have the same problems as you do?

Guess what?

You are not alone! We are all in the same boat. Believe it or not, every one of us is broken and struggling.

Whether you look like you have it all together or you know you don’t, whether you have lots of friends or feel like you don’t have any, whether your family is intact or barely functioning, you can be sure that your peers are experiencing many of the same insecurities and thoughts. The struggles will look different from person to person, but because there is an underlying desire in each of us to be accepted, we all struggle.



I've talked with a lot of teens and conducted an informal, online survey¹ that made the reality of our similar struggles very clear. Among the things I discovered:

- **Almost 75 percent of the teens surveyed struggle with comparing themselves to others, whether on social media, at school, a social event, or elsewhere.**
- **Over 50 percent don't feel like they measure up to their friends. They view their friends as prettier, more popular, wealthier, better dressed, more fun, or just plain cooler in the way they act.**
- **Fifty percent have felt stressed or depressed because they do not measure up.**
- **Fifty percent feel a very high level of stress from the pressure to be perfect at everything.**
- **The majority of those surveyed say they feel alone and cannot talk to their parents about what they are experiencing. Nearly 50 percent say they cannot share openly with their friends.**
- **Even friends are often viewed as unsafe to talk to because survey respondents fear they will be judged, misunderstood, or not taken seriously. They question whether their friends can be trusted or would even care.**
- **Half of the teens said they would change something about their appearance if they could; the other half wish they could change something about their personality or abilities.**
- **Almost everyone feels things must be perfect for them to be happy.**

Whoa! Those numbers represent a generation of struggling teenagers and young adults. It's likely that you identify with these survey responses and your peers do too, whether you think they have it all together or not. My guess is that they, like you, may at times feel alone in their thoughts, afraid to be vulnerable and honest even with friends.



Have you seen The CW show “Gossip Girl,” based on Cecily von Ziegesar’s popular young adult novels? With just one episode, it is apparent that every teen (and adult) character in the show is afraid to be truly known. They hide the reality of their lives and feelings behind the mask of apparently perfect, privileged lives. No one knows how badly the others are hurting. Even girls who are supposedly best friends hold deep secrets and hostility toward each other. Everyone uses the others to get what they want. Though they feign happiness, in one telling scene a teen boy admits to another, “Happiness does not seem to be on the menu.” While the characters may fool each other, it is clear to the viewer that they are all alone and struggling in similar ways.

If you are anything like me, you are asking, why do so many people struggle this way? How does it happen and— even more importantly—how can we change?

Social media, with the endless competition and comparisons it encourages, intensifies our struggle with self-esteem or, as I prefer to call it, our sense of our own worth. But our problems didn’t start with social media or the culture we live in. And, while eliminating social media or isolating ourselves from our surroundings may lessen the intensity of our negative self-talk, it won’t solve the struggles we have at the heart level, the identity level, or the “Who am I and what am I worth?” level.

Without realizing it, we tie our worth to our appearance and performance. How we feel about ourselves rises and falls, based on how we look, how well we do (or don’t do) at any given task, and how we think others perceive us. So when we think we look good, feel good, and perform well compared to those around us, we feel better about ourselves. But when we assume that everyone else is doing better than we are, we feel as if our value is diminished.

Wouldn’t it be nice to view someone else’s post without it affecting your mood? Do you think it’s possible to feel genuinely happy, not threatened, when you read about another’s



accomplishments? Is it possible for the twinge of jealousy *not* to bubble up inside you when your friend gets compliments for how gorgeous she looks?

What would it take to be so secure that other people’s looks have no impact on you? Can you imagine going through life feeling at peace with who you are? Maybe you can’t right now, or maybe you do feel okay today, but you fear that the security is fleeting. I hope that over the next few chapters you will see that, no matter what your unique situation, back story, or struggles, you can find rest in who you are and know your infinite value and true identity in Christ.

REFLECTION TIME

1. How do you identify with the information compiled in the survey?
2. How does it help to hear that other teens feel alone the way you do? If it does not help, why?
3. Why do you think people don’t talk about their struggles or feelings?
4. Are you able to confide in a friend about your struggles or feelings? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think we all have these struggles?
6. Does reading this chapter give you hope that you can live differently?

LAST LOOK AND JOURNALING

Read the verses below and then use the space to reflect on the emptiness of what we look to for significance and “life,” compared to the true hope we have for something better.

Job 15:31 | Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 | Isaiah 57:13 | 1 Peter 1:3–4

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