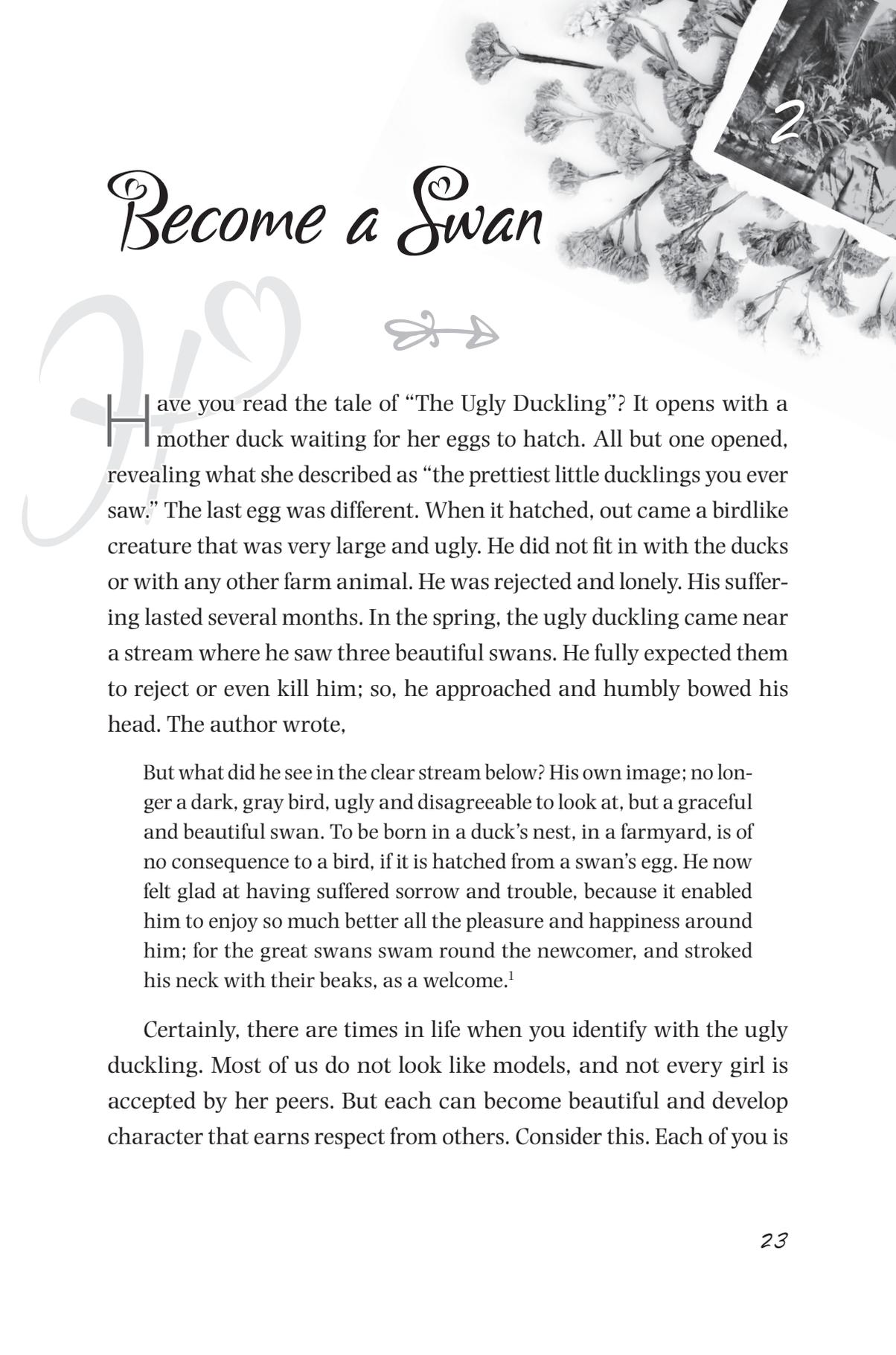


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Become a Swan

Have you read the tale of “The Ugly Duckling”? It opens with a mother duck waiting for her eggs to hatch. All but one opened, revealing what she described as “the prettiest little ducklings you ever saw.” The last egg was different. When it hatched, out came a birdlike creature that was very large and ugly. He did not fit in with the ducks or with any other farm animal. He was rejected and lonely. His suffering lasted several months. In the spring, the ugly duckling came near a stream where he saw three beautiful swans. He fully expected them to reject or even kill him; so, he approached and humbly bowed his head. The author wrote,

But what did he see in the clear stream below? His own image; no longer a dark, gray bird, ugly and disagreeable to look at, but a graceful and beautiful swan. To be born in a duck’s nest, in a farmyard, is of no consequence to a bird, if it is hatched from a swan’s egg. He now felt glad at having suffered sorrow and trouble, because it enabled him to enjoy so much better all the pleasure and happiness around him; for the great swans swam round the newcomer, and stroked his neck with their beaks, as a welcome.¹

Certainly, there are times in life when you identify with the ugly duckling. Most of us do not look like models, and not every girl is accepted by her peers. But each can become beautiful and develop character that earns respect from others. Consider this. Each of you is

a child of the King (God), and that makes you a princess. Let us repeat the words of Hans Christian Andersen,

To be born in a duck's nest, in a farmyard, is of no consequence to a bird, if it is hatched from a swan's egg.

So, dear readers, even if you are struggling now in difficult teen years, you can become a swan.

How to Become a Swan

In the previous lesson, we learned that if we want good attitudes and behaviors in guys, then we must have good attitudes and behaviors. If we are lacking in the features we expect to see in others, how do we

expect to be “the girl” on the checklist of Christian guys?

The swan that you want to become is a spiritual swan. No matter where you were born physically, when you became a Christian, you were born again “a new creature.” Jesus was born in a manger and grew into a man who was not physically attractive. But He was certainly a spiritual swan, living a perfect life and dying a horrible death for you. How could you do any better than to imitate His spiritual example?

*The swan
that you
want to
become is
a spiritual
swan.*



 Find a Bible verse that mentions being a new creature. Write it here.

 Find a hymn that captures the thought of the “new creature” verse.

Even though you might feel like an ugly duckling physically, you can develop the confidence of living the best possible life and being a spiritual beauty. It will not be easy, since the focus of most girls your age is not on inner beauty. And most guys are not gawking at the girls who have heavenly attitudes, but the ones who are pretty by the world's standards. Are they the guys you want? Not if you are a Christian girl. Take careful notice of the following advice.

If you want to know how to become a spiritually beautiful person, be prepared to learn some hard lessons. Whining women do not show the world the strength, character, and beauty of Christ. Each one of us has been put on this earth for such a time as this. As you begin the journey to spiritual beauty, be prepared to make some changes every day as you grow more into the likeness of Christ.²

When you realize that the lessons are hard ones and that change is required, the next step is to determine what needs to change.

The focus of most girls is not on inner beauty, and most guys are not gawking at girls with heavenly attitudes.



A Life-Changing Chart

I was a lonely teen. My ninth-grade school picture accurately and embarrassingly shows my feelings as an ugly duckling. I did not have a positive attitude, and I was not confident of any skill. But there was hope. I learned how to take time every day to concentrate on activities that helped me to mature in just one year into a confident swan!

marry a family. How do his parents treat you? Would you want them as in-laws? His parents will be the grandparents of your children. His siblings may be a part of your life too. Carefully look at his family model.

✍ Research the topic of family abuse. What principle was laid down by Jesus that is the exact opposite?

How Does He Relate in His Family Model?

How does he treat his parents?

Good men and women respect their parents and treat them well. The Bible says, “Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:2–3). You should seek a guy who not only is kind and helpful to his parents but also speaks well of them. He does not say bad things to them or about them. He shows respect.

Not all parents are good parents. Some are abusive, selfish, or mean. Those parents have not earned the respect of their children, but they do hold the position of authority. If you or your boyfriend are in this situation, seek help.

Is he a mama's boy?

It is not good for a man to cling to his parents. A guy may remain tied to his mother's apron strings because he is immature and cannot make decisions without asking her what to do. Or perhaps his mother is domineering and possessive and has never allowed him to be independent or make decisions.

There is a movie about the great baseball player, Lou Gehrig, titled *The Pride of the Yankees*. In the movie, the newlyweds had moved in with Gehrig's parents. His young wife chose wallpaper and furniture for their bedroom. His mother sent it back and ordered paper and furniture that she liked. Imagine the tension in that household! Gehrig's wife did not retaliate but resented the intrusion by her mother-in-law. Gehrig kindly explained the situation to his mother, and it was changed.

Some young couples move in with parents while they save to move out on their own. This can lead to relationship problems. It is best to set a reasonable time limit, six months, for example. The Bible is clear that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Ephesians 5:31; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7–8; Genesis 2:24). If you are not financially and emotionally independent of your parents, you aren't ready to get married. You should rely on your husband, not Mama, for emotional support. After marriage, your husband must be independent of his parents and give his wife priority with his love, time, and money.

Imagine yourself in thirty years or so, and your son brings his wife to live in your basement. It is generous of you to help them out for a while. But it can put a strain on the relationship. After you and your husband have sacrificed time, space, energy, and personal resources for your children—and those days are over—you deserve to enjoy some years for just the two of you. Wouldn't you enjoy having life like your honeymoon days again? Watch out for the dependent mama's boy, and raise your own children to make good decisions.

 Find the "leave and cleave" principle of marriage in Genesis and write it here.

How Does He Handle Life?

The real-life Lou Gehrig was diagnosed with a debilitating illness, later called “Lou Gehrig’s disease.” He was a man of strong character and self-discipline, and therefore handled his bad news, suffering, and impending death with grace. In 1939 he stood before a stadium of baseball fans and proclaimed in his farewell speech, “Today, I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.” He played the game to the best of his ability, he loved his wife dearly, and he followed his parents’ model in a happy marriage. It brought him peace. Look for a guy with this kind of grace under fire.

How does he handle disappointments?

Life’s not fair. Things happen that we do not like. A teacher may give you a grade lower than you think you deserve. You may break a bone in soccer. Your car can crash. Your boyfriend could break up with you. You may develop a terminal disease. How we handle disappointment shows strength (or weakness) of character. How does your guy react when bad things happen? How about you?

Some people do not handle disappointments well. They do not pray. They do not find comfort and peace but, instead, become angry and bitter. When choosing a young man to date, consider how he reacts when things do not go his way? Does he lose his temper and blame the teacher if he fails an exam? Does he explode if the coach replaces him on the field? If someone cuts him off in traffic, does he react with road rage? If someone offends him, does he fire back with insults or violence? If so, life with this fellow would be miserable. Not only would you spend time trying to help him, but he also would be no comfort to you in your struggles.

✍ Check the activities that will help with handling disappointments:

- Research and study the phrase, “I will be with you,” spoken by God.
- Tell everyone you know of your failure or disappointment.
- Pray. Ask God for strength to endure.
- Blame someone else and build up resentment against others.
- Sing to yourself, “I Know the Lord Will Find a Way for Me.”

Where does he go for escape?

We talked about bad habits involving alcohol and drugs. Some people turn to these as a means of escape during bad circumstances. Some lash out and hurt those they blame for the circumstances. Others withdraw from people and life. Watch out for these inappropriate types of escape. Point this guy to a minister or counselor.

Scripture says that God is our “refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). During junior high, as an ugly duckling, I was rejected and bullied. The place where I found the most comfort was in prayer. When I was sad, I talked to God. When I was upset, He gave me peace. When I was hurting, He relieved my pain. Hebrews 4:16 says,

We can feel free to come before God’s throne where there is grace.
There we receive mercy and kindness to help us when we need it
(EASY-TO-READ VERSION).

Consider this avenue when you are troubled. Look for a husband who also trusts God for strength and help. He looks to the future with confidence.

Does He Live with the End in Mind?

Written goals help assure success. Everyone should have a life plan for the next five, twenty-five, and even fifty years. In chapter 1, I asked you to imagine your life a dozen years in the future—perhaps you would want to have a college degree, a great job, and, as many young women hope, a happy marriage to the man of your dreams. As part of that goal, you listed traits you desire in a husband. You realize that to attract that kind of guy, you must be the right kind of girl, so you are taking steps to develop desirable attitudes and behaviors in your life. Set goals now as you develop into a swan.

A swan will succeed in marriage, educational and career goals, and the highest goal of all—heaven. You are working now on these goals. You are living, not just for today, but with the end in mind. An important question to ask concerning a prospective husband is: “Does he live with the end in mind?”

Does he want to go to heaven?

If so, he will love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind, and he will follow His instructions. This man will make the Christian journey easier for you. He will also lead your children to that blessed eternal home.

Has he chosen a career path and is he working diligently to achieve it?

The career he chooses will matter eventually. Does the field lend itself to family time on the weekends? Will he travel during the week? Will his work allow him to attend worship? Will the job allow him free time to attend the kid’s sports games, school plays, and other activities on weekends and evenings?

Does he take school and work seriously, or does he waste time? Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.” A mature young man spends his time wisely, fulfills his responsibilities, and balances work, play, and relationships well. He is a real catch.

Is he committed to a long, happy, and successful marriage?

This is an important goal. Listen to your guy’s hopes and dreams. Does he value the biblical command that “what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9)? Has he deleted the word *divorce* from his vocabulary? Does he look forward to future wedding anniversaries? If so, this young man may be a serious prospect for marriage. He lives with the end in mind.

Beware of “Fool’s Gold”

As you pan for gold, ask the questions of this lesson. Watch out for red flags that signal future problems in a relationship and marriage. How does he relate to others? What are his priorities in life? How does he treat you? How does he relate in his family model? How does he handle life? Does he live with the end in mind?

Ask these same questions of yourself? If you see negative answers, take steps to change. If you need help, talk to your parents or a godly older woman in your congregation who can give good advice or lead you to a counselor or medical professional. Remember that your future son may look for a girl just like you. What do you want in the girl for your son? Begin now to set a good example.



Learn from the Experts

Life is full of new and exciting experiences. In your teenage years, this includes learning to drive. Who in your family serves as the driving instructor? My dad put me on a tractor at age ten and taught me to steer through the fields. To learn anything new, listen to the experts who are willing to teach.

Growing up, dating, becoming a wife and mother, and creating a happy, loving home are new and exciting experiences for young women. There is a lot to learn. So God created a training ministry, like a school, specifically to help young women with these new experiences. Titus 2:3–5 reveals God’s plan for this ministry: the teachers (and their qualifications), the students, and the seven-course curriculum.

The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed (Titus 2:3–5).

The Teachers

God in His wisdom told older women to teach the younger women. Male psychologists and TV personalities are not part of His plan. Not

even all older women are qualified for this ministry, only spiritually mature older women. Titus 2:3 presents four qualifications. They must be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not slaves to much wine, and teachers of good things.

Reverent in Behavior. Older women worthy of imitation must show a deep respect for God. This means their behavior is “holy” (KJV). Vine’s Bible dictionary defines holy as “separated from sin, consecrated to God.”¹⁷ A holy woman avoids sinful actions and attitudes, such as those listed in the Bible:

Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness (Galatians 5:19–21).

To help us avoid these sins, we must learn from godly older women. Being holy is more than just avoiding sin; it means trying to be godly. One way is to grow in the fruit of the Spirit:

Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

God wants all—older and younger—to be holy, just like Him. “As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:15). We can follow the example of holy older women.

Not Slanderers. To slander means to say bad things about others. It may involve gossip, lying, and making false accusations. These can ruin a person’s reputation.

When you talk, don’t say anything bad. But say the good things that people need—whatever will help them grow stronger. Then what you say will be a blessing to those who hear you (Ephesians 4:29 ERV).

Let's use the acrostic for THINK to consider our words. Before we speak, let's ask, Is it . . .

TTrue?

Helpful?

Important?

Necessary?

Kind?

Compare slander to opening a feather pillow in a blustery wind, then trying to gather the feathers back. The damage cannot be undone. We must not be a slanderer or listen to slanderers. If someone begins to say something bad about another, say, "I don't want to hear it." Imitate kind behavior and season your words (Colossians 4:6).

Not Slaves to Much Wine. Addiction to drugs and alcohol is rampant in our society. It was true in the first century as it is today. Juice from grapes was a common beverage. Some people drank it in the fermented state and became drunk. Some even became addicted. Paul made it clear that those who do this will hurt themselves and their influence. We cannot behave as women of God if we are not in control of our words and actions. Ephesians 5:18 says, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation [reckless living]; but be filled with the Spirit." Younger women must look for godly older women who are healthy examples physically and spiritually.

Teachers of Good Things. Our heavenly Father, who knows us best, planned for holy older women to teach younger ones. The class may be one-on-one in a kitchen, a group in a living room, or a formal lesson in a church building. When I was a young bride, Mildred Counts,

*Being holy
is more than
just avoiding
sin.*



an elder's wife, often took several of us into her home and taught us bread-baking, knitting, and how to be a good wife and mother. I cherish the memories of that good woman, and I still practice much of what she taught. Find godly older women to learn from and to imitate.

The Students

Titus 2:3–5 reveals that the students of this curriculum are the younger women. Paul wrote this letter to Titus, a preacher on the island of Crete. It was not easy to be a Christian there because of the immoral environment. In Titus 1:12, Paul quoted a Cretan poet, Epimenides: “One of them, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’” Research by Dewey Fogerson showed that many of the young women in Crete grew up in dysfunctional homes and struggled “especially in marriage relationships . . . Wives were running around on their husbands. They were not being good homemakers.”¹⁸ In our culture, too, the need exists for training young women.

The Seven-Course Curriculum

Older women who have enjoyed long marriages and who have raised good children can share their wisdom and experience. Young women can benefit by listening. Titus 2:4–5 lists seven important lessons older women must teach the younger:

1. to love their husbands
2. to love their children
3. to be discreet
4. to be chaste
5. to be homemakers

6. to be good

7. to be obedient to their own husbands

Let's examine each.

Love Your Husband. Is there really a need for someone to teach how to love a husband? Can't we simply watch our parents? Can't we learn to love by watching TV programs and movies?

If you have parents who show love to each other by kind words, thoughtful actions, and lots of hugs and kisses, you are truly blessed. Yes, you can learn how to love your husband by their example. But many girls, such as those with single parents, do not have such a model. Someone must teach them how to love their husbands. TV shows and movies do not show reality. They show divorce as the answer to marriage problems. Mature couples work things out. Older women who have been married many years can teach how to love and overcome problems.

What is love? The Greek language has several words for love. One is *agape* (charity). First Corinthians 13:4 explains this kind of love as being patient and kind, not jealous, not bragging or being haughty. Some women are impatient and unkind to their husbands. Some get angry and remind their husbands of past mistakes. Verse 5 says love is not rude or selfish, does not become angry easily, and does not remember wrongs done against it. Verse 6 says love is not happy when he does wrong. A woman expresses love toward her husband by forgiving him.

Some women are impatient and unkind to their husbands. Some get angry and remind their husbands of past mistakes.

