

Book Review

By Elizabeth McGrew

Mirror Mirror reflects God's love for teens

When I heard about *Mirror Mirror*, I was immediately skeptical. Given the general genre, I was surprised and delighted by the thoughtful, creative, egalitarian content of the book. I quickly realized I was wrong to judge this book by its cover.

Written by Kara Powell and Kendall Payne, *Mirror Mirror* provides a balanced, even-handed approach to looking at a broad range of issues facing young women, including body image, dating, makeup, leadership, giftedness, health and friendship. Focusing on teaching girls to be content in their relationships with God rather than searching elsewhere for security and love, Payne and Powell do not label issues and topics such as dating or makeup as inherently evil. Instead, through their stories, articles and thought-provoking questions, they address the often destructive and harmful motivations and insecurities behind these things. Payne and Powell steer clear of setting up legalism for teens; rather they attempt to build the reader's understanding of the love of God so that young women are in a better place to make healthy choices and live wholesome lifestyles.

Reading almost like an issue of *Seventeen* (only with more positive themes and messages), *Mirror Mirror* is filled with quizzes, personal stories, quotes from teens, articles, reflection questions and short Bible studies. The quizzes are delightful. I will admit I happily filled in blanks, circled letters, placed checkmarks in boxes and added up my scores to see what the quizzes might reveal about me. The personal stories and quotes from teens add to the conversational style — enabling the reader to feel talked to rather than lectured. The language used is simple, honest, direct and personal.

The heart of the book revolves around encouraging young women to be content with themselves in the light of whom God has created them to be. Young women don't have to be artificial to have friends or to be

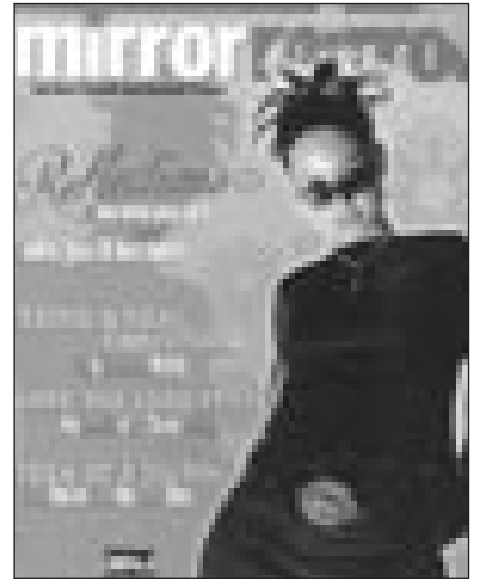
found attractive. Powell and Payne encourage teens to live out the fullness of their giftedness and interests without being overly concerned about the thoughts and opinions of others.

Being smart and capable does not make a girl an outsider, nor should it be something to hide or camouflage. Furthermore, living in contentment and acceptance of one's gifts and abilities should build community and relationships with others. Especially important, I think, is the bold emphasis on challenging young women to remain true to their giftedness when they interact with young men; they should not sacrifice their personhood or abilities in relationships.

Powell and Payne dedicate a chapter to mixed messages that girls receive, and include in this chapter a short discussion on mixed messages women receive concerning leadership: "It's OK to lead and be strong — but don't be too strong since so many male leaders perceive strong women to be threatening." In tackling this mixed message, they discourage a domineering leadership style in both men and women. Alternatively, they propose leadership based on gentle strength. "Gentle strength" leaders are not pushovers, nor are they eager to push over others. They are assertive without being aggressive or manipulative, say the authors.

The margin in this section has comments from males that endorse the concept of women leading — cementing the idea that being a good leader does not make a girl or a woman less feminine or attractive. Rather, the opposite may be true. The questions in the reflection section of the article encourage girls to develop their own leadership abilities. Specifically, one question mentions that "God will call you to lead at times" and, therefore, "what do you need to change in your life to become more of a leader?"

To be critical, the images in the book are not quite on par with its content. Most of the



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girls wear a lot of make-up and are slender and Caucasian. While the written message of *Mirror Mirror* is strong and affirming, the images feel a bit at odds with the words. I worry that some of the great content of the book may be deflected due to the imagery.

However, overall the book contains a thoroughly positive and much-needed message for young women. Teaching teenage girls to be at home in their own skin and to allow their gifts to be used by God rather than feeling ashamed, embarrassed or awkward about them should be a bigger priority for Christians. *Mirror Mirror* provides a much-needed voice in this area.