

Beyond Your Wardrobe

FINDING FREEDOM IN EMBRACING GOD'S CALL
TO MODESTY AND UNFADING BEAUTY

Beyond Your Wardrobe: Finding Freedom in Embracing God's Call to Modesty and Unfading Beauty (Ch, 4 Excerpt)

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To “My Girls”: Katie, Jaylee, Maddy D, Savannah, Emma, Abby, Maddie E, Rachelle, and Samantha. This book and the lessons it teaches would not have happened without each one of you. I pray that you always believe that you are a princess worth dying for.

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4. Keeping the Secret Safe

When I started the seventh grade, I transitioned from homeschooling into a private Christian school. Needless to say, I was pretty nervous. I had been homeschooled since the second grade and didn't know what to expect. It didn't take very long for me to find my way, thanks to my new teacher. One of the things I admired about her so much was that, aside from making sure we got a great education, she called our class her "little disciples," emphasizing that this was more than just a job to her; it was her ministry. I am still receiving the blessings of that ministry today.

One of my favorite lessons I learned from her wasn't even a classroom lesson. It was common around the beginning of the school year to have the "modesty talk" with the female students. They always had a collective one for both junior high and high school girls, but my eighth-grade year, they decided to do a second one with just the junior high girls. At this point, I don't remember too much of what was said in this meeting, but one comment she made has stuck with me ever since she said it. She told us in her sweet little Alabaman accent: "Remember girls, as Gandalf said in *The Lord of the Rings*,

'Keep it secret, keep it safe.'"

Needless to say, we all laughed so hard! People still laugh when I share that story today. In the end, although this comment was meant to be humorous, it also made a powerful point. To understand the point she was making, I want to briefly summarize the plot of *The Lord of the Rings*.

The evil Dark Lord named Sauron created the Ring of Power many years ago, a ring that would allow him to rule all of Middle-earth. When Frodo the hobbit is given a gold ring by his cousin Bilbo, the wise wizard Gandalf suspects it's the Ring of Power. To see if his suspicions were true, Gandalf had to leave immediately to do some research in a kingdom far away (in the film version, at least). Frodo was very confused. Gandalf had only arrived earlier that day and Frodo didn't understand why he had to leave so soon, but Gandalf knew that they could not take any chances until they found the truth. That's why he declared (in both the film and the book), "Keep it secret, and keep it safe!"¹

When Gandalf told Frodo this, Frodo had no idea what the Ring was, the power it had, or the potential danger it posed for him to have it in his possession. For that matter, Gandalf was not entirely sure himself, but until they were sure, Frodo could not take any chances. Gandalf instructed him to keep the Ring hidden, telling no one he had it, and to guard it securely, ensuring no one could steal it. When Gandalf returned, his research had confirmed that Frodo had the Ring of Power, which would send the hobbit on a great journey to destroy the Ring.

The line "keep it secret, keep it safe" has stuck with me ever since that modesty talk when I was fourteen years old. It's funny to think that something you heard at that age would stick with you, but as a *Lord of the Rings* fan, it was humorous and it made sense. As I got older and learned more about what the Bible teaches about modesty, I appreciated this analogy more and more. Men and women alike have also been given a power, although in our case, it doesn't come from a gold ring. Understanding this power and how we should use it is crucial to living a lifestyle of modesty.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS POWER

The first passage we are going to discuss here may surprise you that this is even in the Bible, or that I am publically sharing about this in a book. Regardless, we are going to use this passage to do two things: to help women understand the minds of men and to help us understand the way that God designed our bodies. Let's take a look at Proverbs 5:18-19:

"May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer— may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love." (NIV)

As I said earlier, some of you may be shocked that I chose to share this verse with you. Even though some of this wording seems blunt, this translation is a toned-down version of the original meaning of the Greek words.² So let's look at vs. 19 again, but this time in the ESV.

"Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love." (ESV)

Intoxicated? Now that is strong wording! This verse tells us that our bodies have the power to intoxicate a man with our beauty. It's pretty incredible for us to realize that God designed us that way. This power should be seen as an incredible gift to be used in the right way at the right time. The problem is that most of us are either unaware of how great this power is or we use our knowledge of this power to bring attention to ourselves. As Christian women, our goal should be to save the deepest secrets of our beauty for the man we marry. ² It should be vice versa for Christian men – they should be saving the deepest secrets of their manhood for just one woman – their wife.

1 TIMOTHY 2:9-10

The reason that many people within the church are resistant to the concept of modesty is that there is a collective misunderstanding of what the Bible says about it. This needs to change. We all need to take the time to understand what the Bible tells us about what we should wear, so we can shape our lives in response to it. So I want to take a look at 1 Timothy 2. This is the only direct reference to the word that translates as “modesty” in the New Testament and is usually the first passage referenced when discussing the topic.

“...women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness – with good works” (ESV)

Now is anyone confused by any of the language and cultural references here? To be honest, they confuse me and I’ve graduated from a Bible college! I think that this is one of the main reasons why this passage is avoided: we don’t know how to adapt the cultural references into a contemporary context. So that’s exactly what we are going to do. We’re going to go through the five points that this passage teaches us about how women were supposed to dress back then, so we can learn how we should dress now.

1. WE SHOULD ADORN OURSELVES

First and foremost, Paul says that women should adorn themselves. Remember how I shared earlier that some women use the words “frumpy and dumpy” to describe modesty? I think this passage tells us otherwise. The word that is used for “adorn” here could be defined as making something beautiful. Now, I’m not saying that we need to

plaster on the makeup and wear formal clothes all the time, but I do think that this passage tells us that we should put some effort into our appearance, especially on Sundays at church. It's a great reminder that sometimes, not putting effort into your appearance can be just as much of a distraction as putting too much effort into your appearance. It's important to learn the difference between too much and not enough.

2. WE SHOULD ADORN OURSELVES APPROPRIATELY

This passage also says that we need to be adorned in respectable apparel. The word “respectable” could be translated as modest, proper, suitable, or appropriate. Through my study of the Scriptures, what I believe this is talking about is about learning to dress in a manner that is always “appropriate to the occasion.” This is a phrase I coined that I believe fits best with the concept that this Scripture is teaching here about clothing and modesty. Here are a few questions to illustrate how it works:

Would you want to wear sweatpants and a t-shirt to prom?
Would you wear a prom dress on a regular school day?
Would you wear a swimsuit for a job interview?

If you answered “no” to all these questions, you are right! This is because none of these clothing options are appropriate for the given situation. “Appropriate to the occasion” means learning to have a social awareness about what is appropriate to wear in any and every situation. Some situations, like the ones listed above, are no-brainers. Other situations are not as obvious. For example, if you chose to go on a missions trip to a foreign country, you would probably need to do some research to determine if any of the clothes you plan to bring would be considered

inappropriate in that country. We need to learn to do this in our own country too. We have to learn to be thinking ahead to what is appropriate in each situation specifically because it shows respect and honor to those around us.

3. WE SHOULD ADORN OURSELVES WITH SELF-CONTROL

Next, we are told that we should be adorned with modesty and self-control. The ESV uses these words side-by-side, and I don't think it's a coincidence. The word for "self-control," aside from implying moderation, also can be translated as "sound judgment" or "sound mind." This means that you are to have the discernment to know what is right and wrong and then use your sound judgment to choose to do what is right.

When you know you have the power to attract attention to yourself with your appearance, it takes sound judgment to not use that power selfishly. You have to learn how to intentionally hold back from showing off your body so that you are not a distraction and so you can save yourself for the person you will marry. Learning how to develop sound judgment about the clothes you wear begins with studying His Word. This and other passages in the Scriptures show us principles about clothing and behaviors we should avoid. When you learn these Scripture and take their wisdom to heart, having sound judgment in any situation will become second nature to you.

4. WE SHOULDN'T ADORN OURSELVES IN VANITY AND WORLDLY WEALTH

Vanity is being too focused on your physical appearance. This includes your clothes, but also on your hair, your makeup, your complexion, and even your body image. When you are more concerned with the way you look on Sundays than you are about the sermon, you have

not only missed the point, but you run the risk of becoming a distraction to those around you. You then exchange the sound judgment you're supposed to have for bad judgment that often leads to compromise.

We are also not to get caught up in worldly wealth. Braids, gold, pearls, and costly attire were all ways that women of the early church would display their wealth or social status. These women were trying to make themselves feel more important than the women of lower class. Their appearance became a distraction and proved to be an inappropriate way to dress, especially in a setting of home churches. Even if they were not showing cleavage or their legs, their fancy up-dos, their bright-colored robes, and all their shiny bling were a distraction for those trying to worship the Lord. A church service is not an appropriate place to draw that kind of attention to yourself. It wasn't appropriate in the first century and it's still not appropriate today. That's part of the reason why it's so important that what we wear is appropriate for each given situation.

As I mentioned earlier, I am a big Disney fan. My favorite movie of all time is Disney's animated classic *Beauty and the Beast*. One of the things I have always wanted is an authentic replica of Belle's yellow dress in my size. Just imagine what would happen if my dream came true and I was so excited about getting this dress that I decided to wear the large, yellow, puffy dress, along with the matching accessories and up-do, to a church service. What do you think would happen? It would be a *huge* distraction. People would spend more time watching me than singing the songs or listening to the sermon. Even if my dress wasn't inappropriate, it would be meant to draw too much attention to myself and that would make it immodest. That is what we have to learn to avoid.

5. WE SHOULD ADORN OURSELVES WITH GOOD WORKS (GODLINESS)

Instead of adorning ourselves in wealth and vanity, we are to adorn ourselves with the kinds of actions that bring glory to God, so that we in the process are adorned with godliness. The word “modest” here implies reverence or honor, not only for God, but also for rulers, parents, and others worthy of respect. The way we live our lives should be a continual act of worship to the Lord. We should be adorned with godliness, the good works we do that will point people back to the God whom we profess to worship.

One of my favorite teachings on this passage is by David Platt, author of the book *Radical*. In a longer sermon about 1 Timothy 2, he spends about 7 minutes discussing the biblical concept of modesty. [Link to full sermon available in the back of the book] Of all of the things he said in that sermon, one quote stands out from the rest:

“Let us raise up women across this church that get up every day, including Sunday, thinking humbly, ‘How can I dress today and what can I do today that will draw the most attention to the glory of my God?’ That’s not easy in today’s culture. That’s totally against the grain.”³

I love how this question gets to the heart of biblical modesty. We need to live our lives in such a way that we are not trying to draw unnecessary attention to ourselves. The One we are taking attention away from when we dress this way is the God we worship. We were made to be His creation and to bring glory back to Him. We’re going to take about how to make that happen in the next chapter.

NOTES

Chapter 4

¹ Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1954, 36.

² Gresh, Dannah. “Secret Keeper [DVD]” Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005.

³ Platt, David. “What About Women, Paul?” *Radical.net*, 21 Aug. 2018, radical.net/sermon/what-about-women-paul/.

VIDEO LINK

Chapter 4 – David Platt 1 Timothy 2 Sermon (Note: the section about verses 9-10 starts at 15:28 and lasts about 7 minutes)



<https://radical.net/sermon/what-about-women-paul/>