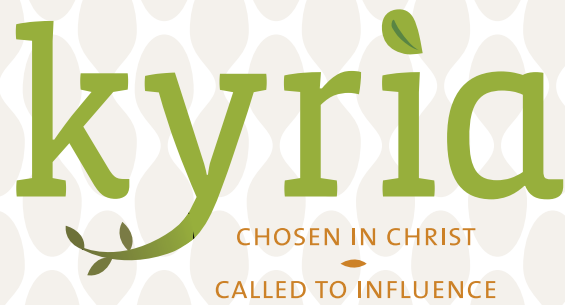


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# Why Modesty Matters

Here's what you  
need to know



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# Why Modesty Matters

Here's what you need to know



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Introduction

# Rediscovering Modesty

by Janine Petry



I'm never at a loss for words. I suppose that's the result of having an over-active imagination and an Italian heritage: I can always think of *something* to say in a voice that can carry over departing jet aircraft. I like to think of it as a gift, though it hasn't always been on everyone's wish list.



Maybe you can relate to me when it comes to having powerful pipes. Even if you can't, that doesn't mean you don't have the ability to make very loud statements. Whether introverts or extroverts, one of the most personal statements we'll make to those around us will be made in silence—spoken through *the way we choose to dress*.

For example, there was a time in my life when I felt needy for attention and acceptance from others. And my clothes clearly communicated that—and more. Through the loving confrontation of a friend, I became aware of the unspoken messages my clothing communicated, and how those contradicted the faith I professed. While it wasn't easy, I resolved to make deliberate changes. And embracing *modesty* provided the direction I needed.

Modesty may seem like a relatively new, man-made concept that stifles and controls. But in reality, its Author predates man and its first appearance can be found just after the Fall (Genesis 3:21). Far from being a method of control, modesty was introduced as a means of protection from indecency; it was God's loving response of provision for us in our sinfulness. As we embrace modesty, we express our gratitude to God and model his love to others.

As you explore the role of modesty in your life as a leader, this download will help guide you. Here, you'll find the wisdom and practical insights you need to gain a better understanding of what modesty is and how it



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empowers women with newfound freedoms. You'll also find other resources packed inside to help you and those you serve go even farther in reflecting the godliness of your heart in your appearance.

Blessings,

*Janine Petry*

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads  
Christianity Today International





The Heart of the Issue

# A Decent Proposal

How to take the high road in a low-rise, skin-is-in society.

by Dannah Gresh



**T**here's a Hooters restaurant in my town, and I struggle each time I drive by it. Although I can hardly see in, that doesn't matter. It's my thoughts of how the waitresses dress that count. It's proof Satan works feverishly not just to tempt a man's eyes but also to infiltrate and control his imagination.

My husband, Bob, wrote those words. While Bob's a godly man in full-time Christian ministry, he, like most men, can be tempted by sexual images. But he's not afraid to talk about it, and that separates him from many.





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The truth is, Christian men struggle deeply with visual temptation and mental sexual sin. Ask more than half of the men who attended a recent Promise Keepers conference and admitted to viewing pornography the week preceding the event. Ask the pastors struggling with online porn who regularly call Focus on the Family's pastoral care line.

Recently the men Bob ministers to have admitted there's a new place where temptation's a problem. "I'm struggling with the way women dress in *church*," they confess. It's the placement of the temptation that makes them feel so vulnerable. What's a guy to do when the same woman in his Sunday school class keeps coming in wearing a mini-skirt and tight shirt? Not much—except maybe sit in the front row.

### Fuel on the Fire

I recently got an interesting e-mail from a young single woman who expressed the crisis many of us face:

"I'm 23 and was raised in a Christian home where modesty was taught. It wasn't until my college years that I began to realize how attractive men found my 4'9", 98-lb. body. Suddenly I had their attention. I work with the youth at my church and my pastor's wife has mentioned to me on several occasions that my skirts are too short or my shirts cut too low. But I always retaliate by saying I'm not going to dress like my grandma, and if a guy can't look at me without thinking of sex, that's his problem."

Been there? Thought that? Me too. Many times the ways I've dressed as a single *and* as a married woman have flown in the face of a man's attempt to live in holiness before God ...







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and, if he's married, in faithfulness to his wife. How that grieves me as I've become more aware of how fragile men are in this area!

Social science reveals a man's sexual response is initiated by his autonomic nervous system (ANS), which isn't controlled by the will, but by the environment. If a man sees a woman walk by wearing revealing clothing, his ANS can be activated. The brain then sends chemicals rushing through his body. He may notice the change in his pulse and his body temperature. While many men override these responses in a godly manner, they can't control their initial intoxicating reaction to an immodestly dressed woman. God intends for a man to enjoy this intoxicating power, but through only one woman—his wife.

### Heart of Darkness?

First Corinthians 10:32 says, "Do not cause anyone to stumble." What an uncomfortable challenge when it comes to fashion! But the problem with immodesty isn't just about causing our Christian brothers to stumble; it's also about our craving for the emotional rush we receive when we know we're being noticed. As the root of a man's sexual sin often is linked with the visual, so ours is connected to the emotional.

I still struggle with the temptation to accept the world's standards for fashion, but now I carry with me an awareness of the responsibility I have as a woman created to be intoxicating to one man, Bob. I've not only had to rearrange my wardrobe, but also my heart. Change hasn't come easily for me; even years after I'd thrown







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away a mass of immodest clothes and was asked to write a book on modesty, I resisted. When I got down to the root of the feeling, I was afraid God might ask me to change my unclean heart. And he did.

While I don't conform to legalistic views about fashion, I do conform to the Holy Spirit's conviction. As I've embraced those promptings, I've discovered a few things that have helped me take the high road in this skin-is-in society.

***If you're married, discuss your wardrobe with your husband. If you're not, try your dad or an older brother.***

Since I travel nationwide to speak with teen girls about sexual purity, I own some travel-friendly, trendy outfits, including a sheer blouse I used to wear over a black tank top. My husband often challenged me about it, but I resisted him, saying it was "a style everyone else was wearing" and "it never looks sexual to me." But a year ago, I removed it from my wardrobe as an act of obedience to God. Recently I received an e-mail in which a woman lovingly confronted me about that specific outfit she'd seen me previously wearing on national television. Ouch!

While I've been able to come to a better understanding of how a man's mind works, I'm still not a man. My husband's better able to explain why a certain outfit may be inappropriate. So every now and then, I ask him how I'm doing. I've been shocked at times when things I deemed appropriate appeared tempting to my husband. I have a single friend who asks her brother for such advice. A godly man in your life can be a good accountability partner.





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***Invite a friend over to clean out your closet.*** If you feel even a twinge of conviction as you read this, I'd encourage you to have a "fashion trashin' party." Invite a godly girlfriend over and trash anything from your closet that's questionable. Your friend's there for the things you're not sure about. Whatever she says is questionable goes.

***Reward yourself with a shopping spree.*** Once you've rid your closet of those questionable items, grab your girlfriend and go shopping to replace what you've discarded. If you're into trendy stuff, this could be tough (I searched for three months last summer for a trendy little sundress and never found one that wasn't way too "little"). But there are tricks that enable me to wear most of the trendy stuff without compromising.

If you absolutely fall in love with a shirt that's too low-cut or too sheer, try a simple T-shirt under it. Buy these together with the promise they'll be worn that way. If you're not sure if a skirt is modest, test it out in the dressing room. Sit in front of the mirror on a chair with your legs crossed. Could you sit like that and not turn beet red if that mirror were your dear old grandfather? If you wear low-rider jeans or pants, compensate by buying longer shirts to wear with them. Not sure if a shirt is too tight? Try this: With the shirt on, use your finger to press the fabric against your chest in the area that's between your breasts. Now, quickly release your finger. If the fabric springs back like a rubber band, it's probably too clingy.

***Spend time focusing positively on what your body truly is.*** If you've accepted Jesus Christ's forgiveness and made





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him your Lord, God dwells within you: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Each time you choose which clothes to wear, you're decorating the temple of the living God.

The apostle Peter advises us on how we should adorn the temple: "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment ... Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:3, 4). Peter's not against the fashions of the day, he's calling women to a higher presentation of modesty, that of an inner confidence to say "no" to the culture.

Sisters, let's develop the inner confidence to say "no" to today's inappropriate fashion—and to adorn the temple of God regally both inside and out.

*Dannah Gresh, the author of And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity and Secret Keepers: The Delicate Power of Modesty (both Moody Press), lives with her family in Pennsylvania. This article first appeared in the May/June 2003 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





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## Reflect

- *Reread 1 Corinthians 10:32 and explain what it's saying. Why is this so difficult when it comes to fashion?*
- *As a leader, how does having a modest or immodest appearance affect your witness? What does 1 Peter 3:3-4 encourage regarding this?*



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Practically Speaking

# The Rise of Raunch

What's a Christian woman to do in today's hypersexed culture?

*by T. Suzanne Eller*



**R**ecently my sister bought me a gift certificate to a popular lingerie store. As I picked out a bra there, a girl no older than 15 walked in with six guys ranging in age from roughly 14 to 18. The boys—their laughter awkward, edgy—nudged the girl toward a rack of revealing lingerie and took turns picking out several sheer, barely-there outfits for her to try on. As they placed the outfits in the girl's arms, her face looked young and vulnerable. But as I tried to catch her eye, the boys veered her toward the changing area.





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I saw her feet as she dropped her jeans. A sales clerk stood near me, so I pointed to the boys lounging against her open dressing room door. "What are you going to do?" I asked.

"There's nothing I *can* do," she said. "This happens all the time."

As a woman and as a mom, I was appalled. I mentioned that the girl was underage, but the clerk shrugged her shoulders, turned away, and started folding underwear. I spotted the store manager across the room. She frowned as she studied the scene. I held up my hands as if to say, *Do you see this?* She also turned away.

I walked over to the changing area and placed myself between the boys and the open door. "You have to leave," I said.

One boy leaned forward. I could feel his breath on my face. "Who's going to make me?"

"You're not my mom," another said, backing up his friend.

"You're right, I'm not your mom. But this is really wrong, and I'm not going to let it happen."

One guy busted through the tight circle and pushed close. "I'll see her later anyway," he said. "What's the big deal?"

"*She's* the big deal. I'm not going to let you do this," I said.



I could hear the girl pulling on her jeans. The guys turned and walked away. She cautiously slipped out of the dressing room and followed them. The store manager stood at a distance and stared at *me*—the woman who'd created a scene. I was so angry I wanted to cry.

### Girls Going Wild

On a recent *Oprah Winfrey Show*, the popular host spent an entire hour discussing the "culture of raunch," the increasing vulgarity permeating our media, fashion, and celebrity culture. One of her guests was Ariel Levy, author of *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. Levy, 30, prompted a national debate when she concluded in her book that by exploiting themselves, women have become, in essence, *female* chauvinists.

"Only 30 years ago, our mothers were supposedly burning their bras and picketing *Playboy*, and suddenly we were getting breast implants and wearing the bunny logo as symbols of our liberation," Levy wrote in a 2006 op-ed piece published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. "How has the culture shifted so drastically in such a short time?"

That's a great question. Today's average 14 to 16 year old is familiar with sexual innuendo and with a woman's body being used to promote an image. She knows what oral sex and STDs are. Her celebrities—the Paris Hiltons, Britney Spears, and Lindsey Lohans—flash flesh and cash, and have sex with little or no consequences. On average, she watches 15 hours of television a week, following programs such as *Desperate Housewives*.





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Even if you're a woman over 35, you're not immune. You're a target, a number in the coveted adult demographic age group, where television shows like *Grey's Anatomy* reign. Each week "McDreamy" gets steamy with Meredith, the intern who slept her way through several one-night stands while waiting for her love to leave his wife. Even though 20 million viewers in the coveted adult demographic tune in each week, do we stop to question the message behind the entertainment?

### Boardrooms and Bottom Lines

What's behind this rise in raunch? Is it reality shows like *Pussycat Dolls Presents: The Search for the Next Doll*, which features scantily clad dancers? Is it fashion that dismisses style over overt exposure? Or that incest, cheating, rape, and sexual violence have become everyday entertainment on shows like *Jerry Springer*?

Many point to youth as the real problem, but adults are the ones in the boardrooms brainstorming ways to paint larger dollar signs on the backs of the next generation. It's they who place cultural icons in the public eye.

Whatever the root cause, our response can't be one of fear. Isolating ourselves from our culture isn't reasonable or responsible. Here's our opportunity to assert the view that being raunchy isn't progressive—that we want to break through glass ceilings in education and in excellence rather than through sexual boundaries. Penny Kampf, a marketing director at my local mall, questioned how she could make a difference. She believes that somewhere along the way, women have allowed





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themselves to be viewed as objects of desire instead of women of substance. "Raunchy is a trend. Trends are merely advertising hypes," Penny says. "The only way I know how to change that is to create a new one."

So Penny launched a community program called 2010 to connect with local high school freshmen girls, and asked several women to serve with her as mentors. Her goal? To redefine what makes women attractive, to show we're more than our appearance, size, and age—even though we're most often judged by those three things. To date, Penny and 30 other women meet with 400-plus girls in four area high schools, promote a "dare to dream" contest, and work on community projects.

### The Value of Other Voices

After that incident at the mall, I didn't want to point fingers yet do nothing. So I prayed. And I thought of that one girl standing alone in the dressing room. My efforts might not be world-changing, but even if they affect a few, that's enough. I joined Penny and the other women in my community as a mentor. Now I speak twice a month to freshmen girls and make myself available to them. While the program isn't faith-based, it's as much a ministry as anything I've ever done.

Prayer can change our attitude so we'll see our culture as a mission field. And we should never underestimate our influence upon it. As we build relationships as a Sunday school teacher, coworker, Bible study leader, neighbor, or mom, we can show the next generation a woman can be beautiful *and* modest. We can be honest about the fact we too are influenced by media messages. And we can begin a





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dialogue about what enriches real-life love, which lasts longer than one hour on primetime. It's important the next generation sees healthy relationships.

Recently I spoke to college-age students at a Saturday night church service, and afterwards, as I walked to our car, my husband, Richard, opened my door. "You rock!" two college girls called out. Later they confided they thought it was cool I had such a great relationship with my husband.

Moments such as these give me an opportunity to serve as a gentle example. I talk with my 20-something friends about loyalty and committed love, and have lengthy discussions on how sex is an amazing gift within a lifelong relationship between husband and wife. We chat about how real value and self-worth are found in Christ.

In addition to serving as a role model, we can add our voice to the mix of women already asking for change. One powerful network is One Million Moms ([www.onemillionmoms.com](http://www.onemillionmoms.com)), a group that's expressing their views to firms that support inappropriate programming. They've also enlisted the help of fathers and men with One Million Dads.

We also can write network and fashion executives. Many marketing execs and media moguls are disconnected from the average person's lifestyle or values. Sharing our opinions rationally and succinctly—without finger-pointing and spouting Scripture—is more effective than we realize. For example, a few years ago, 23 Pittsburgh girls protested T-shirts sold by Abercrombie & Fitch that had emblazoned





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across the chest demeaning slogans such as, "Who needs brains when you have these?" They staged a "girlcott," and the result was a meeting with Abercrombie executives. The next season these tees weren't included in the fashion lineup, and shirts with less tawdry messages were promoted.

But we don't have to stop there. Let's vote with our dollars and with our support of quality programming. Let fashion and media companies know when they're doing something positive. Most companies only hear from believers when a product or program offends. Applaud those that offer creative family-friendly content.

Together we can stand up for our girls and for ourselves. Let's send a clear message that we're not afraid to speak up—and we won't look away anymore.

*T. Suzanne Eller is a speaker to teens and women and the author of Making It Real: Whose Faith Is It Anyway? (Kregel). This article first appeared in the September/October 2007 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*



## Reflect

- *Explain how you've witnessed the "rise of raunch" in our culture. How have women allowed themselves to become "objects of desire instead of women of substance" in this environment? How is this reflected in our outward appearances?*
- *As a leader, how are you facing the challenge to model to the next generation that women can be beautiful and modest? In what other practical ways can you and those you lead "stand up" and "send a clear message" that we, as women, won't tolerate being degraded by our culture's raunch?*



Faith in Action

# Proud to Be Modest

Author Wendy Shalit rattles the female establishment with a hip appeal to tradition.

by Lauren F. Winner



*Wendy Shalit is the new darling of American neoconservatives. As a sophomore at Williams College, she published an article in Commentary called "A Ladies' Room of One's Own," arguing that her dormitory should include a single-sex bathroom. The article got a hostile reaction on campus. But when Reader's Digest reprinted the article, Shalit received scads of letters from college students across the country: "Thank you for writing this," they said. "I thought I was the only one who felt this way." Shalit's first book, A Return to Modesty, argues that the sexual revolution was bad for women, champions modest dress, and urges sexual abstinence until marriage. The book has been assailed by critics from the Left but has found an eager reception among young Christian women who are no doubt delighted to have a champion for modesty who is actually young and hip.*



***You suggest in your book that if people truly understood the value of modesty, they would want to return to a modest way of life. What are some of the misconceptions people have about it?***

There are a lot of myths concerning modesty. One of them is that modesty is Victorian. But, in fact, it dates back way before the Victorian era. It's in the Bible. As long as we've been human we've needed modesty, because as humans we don't just have sex; we also have emotions and vulnerability. Modesty prevented us from being vulnerable with the wrong people. It also protected deep, erotic connections between the right people. When you're young, modesty protects innocence, but when you're older it protects profound connections.

Also, modesty is not about prudery; it is about the opposite of prudery. When people are promiscuous, they can't be moved by anything. So, prudery and promiscuity actually have a lot in common: neither the promiscuous person nor the prude can be moved or touched by anything. The modest person can be moved by something and wants to be moved by something in the right circumstances.

Lastly, modesty is not, as the academy would have us believe, a social construct. Modesty is natural. Consider the behavior of the generation of twenty-somethings. We are taught that we aren't supposed to have meaningful, long-term relationships with one person that eventually culminate in marriage and sex, but that we are supposed to have casual hookups, where you meet a person at a party, have sex, and then never see the person again. That





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people get drunk before they do it is significant—it's a concession to modesty. In our sober, natural state, we can't do this. So we have to drug ourselves in order to pretend otherwise.

#### *How does modesty protect women?*

There's a 1948 song, "Baby It's Cold Outside." It's about a man and a woman, and the man wanted the woman to stay over. His argument was, "Baby, it's cold outside"—if she didn't sleep over, she could catch pneumonia and die, and that would cause him lifelong sorrow. The woman has her own reasons for not staying over, which include, but are not limited to, "My father is there at the door. My maiden aunt's mind is vicious, and there's bound to be talk tomorrow."

There are two ways you can look at this song. You can say, "Gosh, women were oppressed in 1948 because their fathers were waiting for them at the door after their dates. How patriarchal was that society?" But if you actually listen to the song and the back and forth that's going on, you appreciate that the woman was made strong by those excuses, because that father waiting at the door gave her ground to stand on. Back then, this social support for modesty was a kind of armor for a young woman. In the absence of that, in the absence of all of those excuses, a woman who wants to say no to sex is all on her own—that choice becomes a personal thing. It's personal precisely because society has abdicated responsibility for these decisions, and the ground has dropped from under women and men. They can't depend on society anymore for these excuses.





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#### ***So did the women's liberation movement really liberate women?***

Women aren't allowed to be women anymore. That's part of the problem with Prozac and what I call the "curing of womanhood." Doctors prescribe Prozac for women who say they are hurt after a breakup, who say they feel too shy or reticent to go on lots of casual dates. The Prozac has "worked" when they are willing to go out on those casual dates. There is one discussion of a woman who was too particular about the men she dated. But now on Prozac she's dating two men, and she doesn't care how it will turn out. The literature on Prozac presents this as a virtue. A *virtue*? What is this ideal we're presenting to young people? I'd like to see women being proud of their emotions and listening to their instincts instead of trying to cure themselves of them.

#### ***So society is telling women to hide who they really are?***

Exactly. If we live in such supposedly liberated times, why are women made to feel embarrassed about their hopes? Marriage is one central example. If women hope to get married, that should be a legitimate thing. But women today are having to hide that or be manipulative. That's why I like Orthodox Jewish dating so much—it acknowledges that the purpose of dating is marriage.

#### ***Why is having to hide that desire liberation? I don't think it's very liberating. There is more freedom in the restrictions of marriage than in the supposedly liberated world of sex and dating.***

Right. And this, of course, is something that's very much part of Orthodox Judaism, which from the outside looks like, "Oh, there are all these rules and all these things you





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can't do." But from the inside it's not that way at all. I personally have never seen as many true individualists as I see among Orthodox Jews. They dress in a similar way but are so profoundly developed. Their souls are developed uniquely and individually. They seem like they really have freedom because they have a commitment to things.

### ***How do you explain the enthusiastic response your message has received from young Christian women and other evangelicals?***

Serious Christians and Jews have a lot of common ground when it comes to appreciating the importance of modesty. We all instinctively understand that there is a more important purpose for our bodies than just trying everything possible. Young Christian women have a particular challenge because sometimes they are told it is too "legalistic"—i.e., too Jewish—to have specific rules of modesty, and so sometimes they are left without the advice they need.

Ultimately, one longs to know, "What then should I wear?" and "Is it OK to be alone with this particular man?" And so on. Wanting to know the answers to such questions does not reflect a "legalistic" personality—it reflects, I think, an admirable attempt to integrate a virtue into one's own life. And I think it's wonderful that so many Christian women are trying to integrate modesty into their lives—down to the details.

*Lauren F. Winner is a Gifted for Leadership editorial advisor and the author of Girl Meets God, Mudhouse Sabbath, and Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity. This article first appeared in the January 2000 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.*





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### Reflect

- *What is your view of modesty? What are some of the misconceptions you've held about it and how do Shalit's views help combat those?*
- *Do you believe that if people really understood the value of modesty they would want to return to that lifestyle? Why?*
- *How is there more freedom in a "restricted" lifestyle of modesty than in the "liberated" immodest one?*





Getting Deeper

# Rediscovering Holiness



If you think it's just a set of rules,  
you may be surprised.  
*by Ruth E. Van Reken*

**H**oliness. What a strange word. Sounds a little fanatical. What does it even mean? As a teenager, I would have answered that question, "No dancing, no drinking, no movies. Read your Bible in the morning, pray every day, and you'll be fine. The rules are clear. Keep them and thou shalt be pronounced holy."





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My idea of holiness, however, didn't stay that simple. During my twenties, I saw many of those rules for "How to Be the World's Best Christian" cited as examples of legalism by fellow Christians. After all, didn't King David dance before God (2 Samuel 6:14)? And didn't Jesus turn water to wine at a wedding (John 2:1-11)? As I began to consider these things, my perspective on holiness started to change.

For example, as a young mom, I felt relieved to learn God didn't require a specific time for devotions, such as first thing in the morning. With my new freedom I soon went from feeling guilty if I missed my morning quiet time to often going to bed without having spent any time with God that day. How easy it was to slide from legalism to license!

Yet, in the midst of my liberation, unease gnawed at my soul. If holiness only meant keeping certain rules and now the rules were gone, was the idea of holiness extinct? If not, what did it mean to be holy without being legalistic? Was such a thing possible?

I asked my wise friend Barb her thoughts on holiness. Barb instantly replied, "It attracts me like a magnet." I was shocked. This obviously hadn't been my picture of the word. When I asked her why, she replied, "Because it's so beautiful. Holiness shines in the darkness to remind us of how things should have been and what they will be one day."





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### Rediscovering Holiness

Back to square one for me! If holiness was indeed beautiful (as Psalm 29:2 also says) rather than oppressive (as I'd thought), I needed to ask God for fresh eyes to see it.

First Peter 1:16 says I'm to be holy as God's holy. If holiness relates to purity and being set apart, how could I achieve it? Maybe the strict rules of my past were correct after all. But returning to them didn't feel like the right answer. Scripture clearly teaches that I am to live a life distinct from the world (James 4:4). But such a life is far different than keeping a few rules. Why?

First, holiness starts with God—not me. I enter the realm of holiness by accepting Jesus as my Savior. In this process, God not only forgives my sin (John 1:29), but he tells me I've been bought with a price—the precious blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:20). God set me apart for himself and moves me from the world's kingdom into his kingdom (John 3:5).

But then there's *my* part in the "holiness plan." While true holiness originates with God, he asks for my response as well. Initially I'm asked to receive God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16-17). But that's not all. My actions matter. God wants me to live a pure life according to *his* standards.

Why? Because as his follower, I represent God to those who don't yet know him. God designed his kingdom—made up of his followers—to reflect his character. For instance, while the world says to curse my enemies, God instructs me to bless them because his character







## Why Modesty Matters

### Rediscovering Holiness

consists of blessing people. He declares that greatness is found in servanthood, not in human power. God says my body 'is his temple, and I'm not to use it for immorality. His principles for how I'm to live are clear and definite, but most significantly—and surprisingly—they aren't specific rules for every possible situation.

That takes me back to my first question. If holiness isn't about following a group of specific rules, but it does relate to my behavior, what's the practical difference between holiness and legalism?

*Holiness* calls me to live by faith, not by sight. Because God gives us principles rather than specific rules for living a holy life, his kingdom can be lived in some measure here on earth in all generations, in all cultures, in all times. How these eternal principles are applied will look different in each circumstance, but God's *principles* never change. One person may be a vegetarian, for example, while another eats meat, yet both honor God (Romans 14:2-3). To live a holy life means I must constantly go back to God for direction on how to live out these principles.

*Legalism*, however, occurs whenever a legitimate application of a certain principle is turned into an absolute. Soon this rule replaces the principle itself and one of two things usually happens. First, those who faithfully follow the rule can become self-righteous, easily forgetting to consider further applications of the underlying principle. For example, Philippians 4:8 tells us to think on whatever things are true, lovely, admirable, or pure. As a teenager I didn't attend



movies in the theater lest I violate that principle, but I conveniently overlooked how some tv shows and books could feed my mind with far more impurity than certain movies might.

On the other hand, when the legalistic rules themselves are exposed as the non-absolutes they are, it's easy to believe that there are no absolutes. Not only is the legalism discarded as irrelevant, but the eternal principle initially behind it is often discarded as well. Take the "no dancing" edict of my high-school days. It began as an attempt to help us follow scriptural injunctions to avoid sexual temptation. When the rule was tossed, it became easy to forget that God's command to flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18) still stands—forever. Once God's absolutes are ignored, our liberty quickly turns into license. We become so proud of not being legalistic, we forget to wonder if we're being obedient.

Being holy isn't always easy. God often exposes an area in my life in which I still hide sin. He shows me I need to repent. Other times holiness is liberating. Because this is about life in God's kingdom, not mine, I can afford to forgive those who have wounded me, to share with those who can never repay, and to overcome evil with good. As a Christian, my job is to be obedient, while God's job is to figure out the rest.

My friend Barb (and the psalmist!) are right. There is beauty in holiness. It's the beauty of seeing God's kingdom grow here on earth as God's followers live out his intended plan. In that process, living a holy life makes



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us the light that shines in the darkness and the salt to preserve the good (Matthew 5:13-16). Holiness is important and relevant. And it still matters in our world today.

*Ruth E. Van Reken is a speaker and author of several books, including **Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds** (Intercultural Press). This article first appeared in the May/June 2002 issue of **TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN**.*

## Reflect

- *Reread James 4:4. How does our appearance fit in with this verse? How are you striving to respond to this in your life, and specifically in the way you dress?*
- *The author writes, "As his follower, I represent God to those who don't yet know him. God designed his kingdom—made up of his followers—to reflect his character." How does your example of modesty as a leader reflect God's character?*
- *What's the difference between "holiness" and "legalism"? Explain what these might look like when it comes to the issue*





Biblically Speaking

## Rebel Yell

The conference brochure said  
“no pants,” but my inner Bad  
Girl said “no way!”

*by Liz Curtis Higgs*



**A**fter years of traveling and speaking, I've learned which clothes work on the platform and which styles to avoid. Slacks are out. They look great on other women, but on me ... let's just say waistbands require a waist, and bell-bottoms aren't meant for a woman with a bell-shaped bottom.

No problem. I've always been perfectly happy in dresses, on the platform and off.





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Rebel Yell

Then came the day I was invited to speak at a weekend conference where the speakers' handbook clearly stated: "Please, no pants."

I stared at the page, incredulous. Having attended many a conference where one of the speakers wore a skirt with a slit that revealed more leg than she intended, I had no quarrel with a cautionary word about platform attire, but ... *no pants?! This is the 21st century, after all.*

*Fine. No pants.* I wasn't going to wear them anyway, right?

The cover letter from the committee mentioned it again, in boldface type: **Skirts and dresses only**. And when I called the conference office for directions, the woman on the phone gently reminded me once more: "Thank you for not wearing pants, Liz."

"I never wear them," I assured her, my jaw twitching as I said it. *Almost never*. I did have one rather nice, slinky black pair with a matching tunic ...

When the time came to pack for the big weekend, the only pair of pants I owned beckoned to me from the far recesses of my closet: *Pick me. Pick me.*

"No pants," I grumbled, choosing two favorite dresses instead. Unless ... unless I could wear the pants outfit simply for traveling. Watch the women's eyes widen when they met me at baggage claim. Give them a tiny scare ...

*Shame on you, Liz!*





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Rebel Yell

I dutifully packed my ankle-length dresses while a skirmish raged inside me. Good Girl Liz wanted very much to bless these godly women and dress as they requested. But Bad Girl Liz stuck out her lower lip, chafing at their rules, toying with rebellion.

Three little words echoed in my heart. Not the words of the committee chairman—"No pants, please"—but the words of Jesus: "Remember Lot's wife!" (Luke 17:32).

She, too, had been given a simple set of instructions: "Don't look back!" (Genesis 19:17). Did she obey? She did not. "But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt" (Genesis 19:26). Her disobedience cost Mrs. Lot her life, Mr. Lot a wife, and the two little Lots a mother.

What a terrible price for a backward glance!

Some people say she pined after the material goods she left behind. Yet I wonder if she didn't also have a rebellious streak wending through her soul. "*Don't look back?*" *Watch me.*

And what about *you*, Mrs. Higgs? Thumbing your nose at the committee, offending the audience, dishonoring the Lord.

What a foolish risk for a pair of pants!

My struggle that weekend had nothing to do with a yard of fabric fitted around my legs and everything to do with a thin layer of rebelliousness still wrapped around my





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heart. Even after two decades of walking in grace, I stood ready with my rebel yell: "You can't make me, God!"

*No, Liz. But I can love you. Will you love me?*

There's the rub: Do I love God enough to submit, even when it rankles? To do what those in loving leadership require without getting all prickly? To put aside my strong will in favor of God's will? "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

In other words, could I wear a skirt instead of pants and not look back?

I could. And, out of love for God and respect for my sisters, I did.

*Liz Curtis Higgs is the author of 26 books, including her novel, Fair Is the Rose (WaterBrook Press). She lives with her husband and their two teenagers in Kentucky. This article first appeared in the May/June 2004 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*





### Reflect

- *The author wrote, "My struggle that weekend had nothing to do with a yard of fabric fitted around my legs and everything to do with a thin layer of rebelliousness still wrapped around my heart." How does this struggle describe the challenge to dress in a godly and modest way?*
- *What is the purpose of dressing so as not to offend our Christian brothers and sisters? Why is this so difficult to submit to when it comes to clothing?*



Bringing It Home

# The Clothes Crisis



Skin-tight T-shirts and hip-slung jeans are the hallmarks of fashion for teen girls. Here's how you can help your daughter make choices that show off her heart, not her body.

*by Dannah Gresh*

**W**hat's the number one thing that causes you to feel sexually tempted," my husband asked a roomful of lanky teenage boys. They wasted no time answering.

"I think the worst thing by far is the way girls dress in church," one boy replied.

A room full of bobbing heads affirmed his answer.





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"It's like church is supposed to be a place where you don't have to face temptation and you walk in and Bam! There it is. How do you avoid that?"

They all turned their eyes to my husband, pleading for a good answer.

You've undoubtedly noticed it, too. The crop tops, the visible bra straps, the low-slung jeans that make up today's fashions for girls are everywhere. The discomfort we feel when we look at these clothes isn't just the result of our age. Fashion today really is all about sex.

If you're not convinced, consider the images our daughters face every day. Candies, a popular teen clothing and shoe label, is currently running an abstinence campaign. It's promoted by the sale of T-shirts—teeny, tiny, belly-revealing, breast hugging T-shirts that read "Be SEXY: It doesn't mean you have to have sex."

These messages have convinced our daughters that this kind of sensual exposure is merely fashion. They don't understand that what's really being promoted is the idea that their bodies are for show, for the pleasure of others, not sacred temples meant for God's glory.

### The Sex Connection

Surprisingly, it isn't just Christians who are growing concerned over this trend of sexualized fashion. An editorial in the *Indianapolis News* stated that, "Those who minimize the correlation between immodesty and sexual promiscuity deceive themselves and others."





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Studies that analyze the risk of teen sexual activity consistently point out that a girl who looks older than she is has a greater risk of becoming sexually active. And puberty isn't the only thing that makes a girl look more mature. Clothing and make-up can help a 12-year-old look 15 in minutes.

It's also not simply a teen issue. Even little girls' clothing stores stock outfits that carry a whiff of sex: jeans that ride well below the waist, tight T-shirts that say "Sassy" in glittery letters, short shorts, and platform shoes.

The issue of modesty is one that every parent needs to take seriously. The real question is how to do so in a way that our daughters will listen to and take seriously. We don't want to create a spirit of rebellion by coming across as unreasonable, or rob our daughters of their innocence by introducing issues of sexuality that they might not be ready for. In my work with teenage girls, I've found that the best approach is to arm girls with the information they need to make a godly decision and encourage them to reflect God in the way they dress. Here's how to do just that:

### **Affirm Your Daughter's Female Allure**

Advertisers have spent millions learning what makes a person spend time looking at an ad. They've learned that if you really want to stop the reader, use a woman. It seems a photo of a woman will increase the length of time someone spends with an ad by 14 to 30 percent. What power!

God's word affirms that power. Proverbs 5:18-19 says, "Rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you be ever





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captivated by her love." That word "captivated" could also be translated as "intoxicated." The God of the universe looks down at a woman and comfortably acknowledges the power she has to intoxicate a man.

Short, tall, thick, thin, freckled, or fair-skinned, your daughter is created with an incredible power. I like to call it the female allure. It is a power that your daughter must use wisely.

Flip through a few magazines with your daughter and point out the way women are used in advertising. Talk with her about the beauty God has placed in her and the power that gives her. When you tell her about the power, you'll also need to tell her specifically what God had in mind when he gave it to her.

### **Point to the Purpose of Her Power**

Check out that Scripture passage once again. It tells a man to "rejoice in the wife of your youth." In other words a man is to be intoxicated by just one woman. Again and again the Bible confirms that this intoxication is only to be shared with one man, within the context of marriage. Until then, it's under wraps—a secret to be shared only with her husband.

As you might have noticed, girls today aren't the best secret keepers. They are clearly missing the mark of God's intended purpose for their allure. Instead of intoxicating one man with her beauty, she intoxicates many men. For many girls, that feels like power in itself. It feels good to gain the attention of a boy. It feels good to know a boy thinks she's attractive. But what girls need to understand





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is that a teenage boy's attraction typically has little to do with what's special or lovely about her. It's based on his curiosity. By using her body to attract the attention of an eager boy, she is wasting the power God's given her.

#### Explain the Male Mind

Most young girls wear fashion with much naiveté. They have no clue how their appearance impacts boys. That doesn't mean that there are not the occasional young girls who understand fully what they are doing when they flaunt their bodies, but I find them to be the exception.

To help girls understand how the male mind works, I use a visual design theory called The Gestalt Theory. Graphic designers employ this theory to control the length of time a person looks at an image by using an incomplete image to draw the viewer's attention. Completing the incomplete intrigues the human brain, so a person will always pause to finish an unfinished picture.

When a guy sees a girl walking down the street wearing a tight shirt with her belly bared, he completes the picture. A low-cut blouse, a tight T-shirt, a long slit in a long skirt, or a mini-skirt are just enough of a peek at the body to cause a guy to finish the picture.

If a young woman wants to use the power of her allure as God intended it to be used, she needs to be cautious not to awaken the imagination of many men by inviting them to complete the picture of her body. Again, it might feel great to attract attention from men, but that attention is based on something completely random. It has nothing to do with her. When a girl understands that male attention—



particularly teenage male attention—has nothing to do with her, she'll begin to see that she only cheapens herself by playing into this male impulse.

#### **Establish Dialogue and Expectations Early**

If you explain these simple principles to your daughter when she is eight, nine, or ten—rather than after she's fully developed— she is more likely to embrace them. Talking to her before she develops also allows you to avoid making her feel like her new curves are "bad." The issue is not her body. God made it and it is beautiful. The issue is the clothes. When we wait until our daughters develop to address modesty, they often feel self-conscious and guilty about the beauty that's growing in them.

My daughter, Lexi, is eight. Last summer we said "good-bye" to tiny spaghetti strap T-shirts. We've encouraged her to sit in front of the mirror with her legs crossed before she leave the house in shorts or a skirt so she can check to make sure her underpants don't show when she sits down. She likes the responsibility that comes with these mature guidelines. And she's quick to ask me if I've tested my fashion choices. Because I've introduced this issue early, it's kind of a neat "girl thing" for us to share, not some rule that causes friction between us. My hope is that she'll see the benefits of these choices and keep making wise decisions as she moves into her teen years.

#### **Remember, the Battle is not Just about Clothes**

At the heart of the modesty issue is something precious—your daughter's sense of worth. Sexy clothes might grab attention, but for all the wrong reasons. When a girl discovers how easy it is to attract boys with her body, she'll



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be less likely to invest in developing the inner qualities that will make her truly beautiful. In time, she'll recognize the shallowness of the attention she's received, but may doubt she really has much more to offer.

Girls also need to know that they invite a host of assumptions about their character when they dress in a sexual way. Sadly, teenagers are not always kind to girls who appear to be open to sexual activity. And once a girl is labeled with a poor reputation, it can be hard to convince people she's a "good" girl.

Help your daughter discover the gifts for which she wants to be recognized and give her the opportunity to explore those gifts. And help her understand that, while it might be unfair, people really will judge her by how she looks.

If you find yourself in a moment—and you will—when you wonder if this is a battle that's really worth fighting, think about the innocence God places in children. That precious little girl of yours is worth a few arguments over bra straps.

*Dannah Gresh is the author of **And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity** and **Secret Keepers: The Delicate Power of Modesty** (both Moody Publishers). This article first appeared in the March 2002 issue of CHRISTIAN PARENTING TODAY.*





## Reflect

- *Gresh encourages parents to affirm their daughters' powerful female "allure." How do you think understanding this empowers girls and equips them to make appropriate clothing choices?*
- *Gresh writes, "Help your daughter discover the gifts for which she wants to be recognized and give her the opportunity to explore those gifts. And help her understand that, while it might be unfair, people really will judge her by how she looks." How have you experienced this in your own life? How might you help the younger generation deal with this truth?*



# Additional Resources

**A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue,** by Wendy Shalit (Simon & Schuster Trade Sales, 2000). Shalit presents a thoughtful three-part essay, revealing an impressive reading list as she probes the cultural history of sexual modesty for women and considers whether this virtue may be beneficial in today's world—if not an antidote to misogyny. In an age when women are embarrassed by sexual inexperience, when sex education is introduced as early as primary school, and when women suffer more than ever from eating disorders, sexual harassment and rape, Shalit believes a return to modesty may place women on equal footing with men.





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### Additional Resources

**A Spirit Fit to Lead**, a downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**, will help you explore ways to keep your spirit uplifted so you will be able to lead others. When our souls aren't being nourished, it can be easy to bring unnecessary challenges into leadership situations—whether at church, work, or even at home. Maybe we aren't as patient as we could be. Maybe we seek conflict instead of peace. Maybe we ignore the promptings of the Holy Spirit when we should be focused on them.

**Battling a Negative Self-Image**, downloadable resource from **GiftedforLeadership.com**. Here's how to become the "wonderfully made" woman God made you to be. This downloadable packet from Gifted for Leadership serves as a comprehensive guide to help you get a better view of yourself from a godly perspective.

**Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America**, by Jeff Pollard (The Vision Forum, Inc; 2003). In today's "anything goes" culture, modesty has nearly become an archaic concept. Avoiding both license and legalism, Pollard takes a probing look at the historical roots for the rise of indecency in this country—especially as it pertains to modern swimwear—and challenges Christians to embrace God's standards anew. Courageous and compelling!

**Designed by God: Honest Talk About Beauty, Modesty, and Self-Image**, by Regina Franklin (Discovery House Publishers, 2006). Whether she's online chatting with friends, reading a magazine, or watching her favorite television show, today's young woman faces a constant





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barrage of guarantees that she can become prettier, skinnier, sexier. Find the perfect look. Lose 10 pounds. Buy designer clothes like the stars. Attract your favorite guy. Is it any wonder that young women always seem unhappy with who they are? Is it any wonder that when it comes to modesty and demeanor, many young Christian women look much like everyone else in the culture? Regina Franklin speaks honestly but sensitively to young women about who God created them to be.

**Embrace Grace**, by Liz Curtis Higgs (Random House, 2006). The forgiven life. The grace-filled life. It begins with an embrace. Wherever you are spiritually and whatever you have been through emotionally, *Embrace Grace* brings the welcome, life-giving message that you are already enfolded in the arms of One who believes in you, supports you, and treasures you. Join Higgs, the best-selling author of *Bad Girls of the Bible* as she helps women let go of past mistakes and disappointments. Learn how you can accept the gift of divine mercy—and embrace the joyful freedom that grace provides.

**Health Matters**, a downloadable resource from **Kyria.com**. Need inspiration and motivation to take better care of yourself? This guide reminds us how to honor God by treating our bodies with respect. There are articles by well-known experts on motivation, health, heart disease, exercise, check-ups, emotional health, and more. Plus, thought-provoking questions for individuals or group study.





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**Inner Beauty**, a downloadable resource from **Kyria.com**. Every aspect of our physical appearance can be considered a curse or a blessing. When it all boils down, it really doesn't matter how we look; it's about how we appear to God—how we appear on the inside. Download this Life Guide for articles that focus on inner-spiritual development and offer hope to anyone struggling with their own physical appearance.

**Secret Keeper: The Delicate Power of Modesty, New Edition**, by Dannah Gresh (Moody Publishers, 2005). Every woman is born with power! Have you ever thought: Why can't I wear what everyone else is wearing? My parents are hung up on their old sense of fashion. Times have changed! Isn't it really the guy's problem if he's tempted? The practice of modesty is an intriguing and untapped power source. Let Dannah give you the facts of this power and show you how it really works.



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