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Chapter 7

Modesty: A New Approach

1 Timothy 2:9 "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety..." (NIV)

I've shared my heart with you about relationships, materialism, and self-image—all issues that I feel strongly about, and all issues that have affected my life in a major way. Not to mention, they're all issues that are easily brought to the table. I think every girl could openly admit that she struggles from time to time with at least one of those things. But now I want to talk about something else that I've learned a lot about lately, an issue that maybe we haven't thought about enough, but an issue that very much needs to be dealt with: modesty. I can already hear you groaning. I can picture your eyes rolling back towards your head. *Modesty? What an old-fashioned word! To be modest you practically have to cover up your whole body—where's the cuteness in that? Modest people are so out of touch with fashion. It's definitely not an issue.*



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If those are your thoughts, then this chapter is definitely for you, because I want to talk about modesty in a way you might not have heard before. Modesty does not mean that you can't dress in style. It doesn't mean you can never look adorable in an outfit again—if that were the case then I'd join you in the eye rolling and I probably wouldn't even want to write about modesty in the first place. It doesn't mean you have to wear long, baggy t-shirts with no flattering elements whatsoever (unless you want to go back to the eighties styles, which – brace yourself – are coming back into style). No, modesty doesn't mean any of those things and, sadly, I believe that too many girls in this generation think that modesty *does* mean those things. And when you define it in that stereotypical way, it comes off as boring, unattractive, and maybe even snobby or prudish. And no girl wants to be any of those things.

But not only have I learned a different (and real) definition of modesty, but I've also learned the importance of it and *why* God commanded women to be modest in 1 Timothy 2:9. (See beginning of chapter.) He didn't command us to be modest for no reason, and His command was not one that He meant only for women back in Bible times. He put it in the Bible for us to see, hear, and obey *today*, in this generation.

Unfortunately, we're living in a world where true modesty has gone out the window. It hardly even exists. I find that I walk into the mall and have a hard time finding a pair of shorts anymore that cover a decent portion of my legs. And no, I'm not looking for shorts that go down to my knees.

Skirts are no better. Of course, you can always find the "little past the knees" style, which is still very cute, but mini skirts just *had* to come back in style! Mini skirts with ruffles, and flowers, and layers—every kind. And I'm talking *mini*. *Barely there*. And you know what I think? The skirts could be



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really cute—I actually really like a lot of them. But the fact that they practically show everything just kills it. And in the end I don't even get to wear the skirts for the fact that I really don't want to expose half my underwear when I sit down.

The other day I walked into a store and just stared in amazement at one of the mini skirts that was being sold. I was thinking, *Where's the rest of this thing?!* It looked like a once-cute skirt that was cut in half! *Does no one give any care to what they're wearing anymore?* I really don't think they do. I think it's come to the point where it really doesn't even matter how much skin we're showing.

And not only are we encouraged to show our bottom half as sexily as possible, but we're bombarded with styles that show off our top halves just as much. Whether it's short shirts (short enough to show that adorable little belly button ring!), low necklines, or (literally) see through material, you'll find the style out there—whether it's flattering or not. The message we get is: *However you dress, just make sure you look attractive and sexy. Make people want you. Make heads turn.* Sexy, sexy, sexy. That's what young women want to be. What happened to words like “elegant” and “classy?” They seem to have disappeared, that's for sure.

About two years ago I remember my mom telling my sisters and me one day after church about something a lady had said to her. The lady had two sons who were in the tween-teen stage. She went up to my mom and told her how much she appreciated the modest way my sisters and I dressed. *Wow, I thought, I never knew it was that big a deal or that what I was wearing was actually making a difference.* I was surprised to know that someone was actually watching me and the way I presented myself. Yet, I was also somewhat surprised that she was speaking about me. Am I all that modest? Do I really dress much more modestly than other girls? Compared to



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some girls I knew I could answer an honest “yes,” but what’s the point of comparing? I needed to look at myself and no one else.

Modesty has never really been the easiest thing for me. I’ve been blessed enough in the long run to have a mother that kept a close eye on what my sisters and I wore, especially in public. Of course, when I was younger I wasn’t wise enough to appreciate her efforts.

I remember when I was in fifth grade and spaghetti strap shirts became real popular. Everyone was wearing them. Well, my mom had a rule. We couldn’t wear them unless we were wearing a tank top underneath to cover our bra straps and just for more coverage in general. I remember having stupid little arguments with my mom over it. “But Mom! So and so’s allowed to wear them! It doesn’t look bad!” I can’t remember if I won any of those arguments but I do know that most times my mom came out the winner—a tank top underneath it was.

And as the years went on my mom continued to monitor our wardrobes. She’d look at us before we went out. Were our jeans too tight? Were our shirts too short or too low or too tight? She let us know if they were, and it brought up many stupid little arguments that could have so easily been avoided if I had been mature enough to realize why she was doing what she was doing.

The reason that modesty has many times been a hard thing for me to deal with is because I really love fashion. I love putting random things together to create unique and fun outfits. I get excited when I can go into a thrift store and buy an abandoned scarf for ninety cents and then bring it home and make an outfit out of it. I guess you could even call it a little hobby of mine to come up with outfits that, at first glance, you might say wouldn’t work. It might sound kind



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of ridiculous, but I know there's some of you out there that can relate to me. Dressing is something *fun*. I love watching the styles change and I love to observe what other girls are wearing and appreciate all the creativity that some put into their outfits. I think that allowing fashion to be something creative and unique is such a fun part about being a girl. We get to choose from so many different styles, whereas with guys there are only a few different options. We get to spice up our outfits with jewelry and hair accessories and purses.

With such an interest and love for fashion, not only has it been hard for me to be content with what's in my closet, but it's also been hard for me to watch what I put into my closet. When I go shopping I'm instantly surrounded with styles that tempt me to show more skin than I know I should. It's tempting to talk myself into thinking a shirt is too loose (when really it fits fine) and go for the next smallest size that fits a little too tightly. And sometimes I've given in to that temptation, only to regret it later.

I know I'm not the only girl going through this. How do I know this? Because it's an obvious fact that as girls, whether we enjoy fashion or not, there's a longing inside each one of us to be attractive. We like to look nice and we want others to acknowledge that. Whether we express it or not, we secretly love it when a guy turns his head when we walk by with an approving look on his face. It's a part of our human nature to want to be told we're beautiful. It makes us feel good inside.

Modesty is something I feel so strongly about because I've learned that dressing is something that God cares a great deal about. Dressing is even something that I can do to honor and glorify God or something I can do to dishonor Him, and in the meantime, possibly cause a world of destruction among others around me.

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How on earth can you cause any kind of destruction by what you wear? Dressing is not something that has anything to do with God, anyways. Why does He care what I wear? He has way more important things to care about and besides, if I were to go shopping with God, there's no way He would pick out anything in style. Clothes and God just don't mix. Are these your thoughts? I know they're the thoughts of many girls out there, but even worse, I know that many other girls out there don't even stop to think about it. They're oblivious to the fact that, *yes*, dressing in a certain way *can* cause destruction—in ways that many girls may not even be aware of.

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MEANS OF DESTRUCTION

The weapons are very powerful

1 Corinthians 10:32, "Do not cause anyone to stumble..." (NIV)

So, to end the suspense, the destruction that girls can cause when we don't dress modestly is to – surprise! – guys. The guy sitting behind you in first period. The guys walking past you in the hallway. Your younger brother's friends. The guys you hang out with on the weekend. Your boyfriend. And the guys that you sit next to in the pew on Sunday. Satan works harder and harder every day to destroy their minds and every inch of their purity. He is very familiar with the female longing to be wanted and attractive and He uses the way we girls dress to trick us into thinking that dressing to be noticed is the answer to our heart's desire. But in fact, Satan turns it around so that by the time we're finished trying, 1) we're still empty inside and 2) he's already done his work by violating various guys' hearts and minds. Satan is using the way girls in this generation dress to get a hold of the minds of the



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male population everywhere, seeking to steal every last drop of their innocence. The result of Satan's tactics? Guys with lustful eyes, lustful hearts, and lustful thoughts that we could have helped prevent in the first place.

It's not our fault! We don't make the fashions! Guys are always thinking about sex, anyways. We have no control over their thoughts—we'll dress however we want. It's the guy's fault if he chooses to think of what's underneath our clothes just because he almost gets a full-on glimpse.

Wrong. As young women, we have a *huge* responsibility to guys, a responsibility that often goes underestimated. When we dress in a way to seduce or lure a guy on to sexual thoughts, it is our fault. When we purposely dress in clothes that we are fully aware are going to make a guy look twice, we are at fault. We are ignoring the responsibility and pretending not to dress that way on purpose, pretending that, oops! you didn't even realize half your back was showing!

I think too often we just blame guys for being a guys and we get this general picture in our heads that, secretly, all guys are these sick perverts that can't keep their minds out of the gutter. We might also assume that just because a guy is in church, he's not going to have any problems with lust. It's not fair to guys at all to make those assumptions. Number one, a guy is a guy and his hormones are going to function the same whether he's singing in the church choir or looking at pornography. Number two, it may be true that guys usually think about sex more than girls, but as sisters in Christ, that's no reason for us to make it all the more hard for guys to remain pure in heart and mind. We complain about guys being "perverted" but we don't do anything to stop it! When we wear shorts that are practically riding up our butts or shirts that practically show everything when we bend over, we're being completely ignorant of our God-given responsibility



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and in the meantime we cause our brothers to stumble away from purity, and cause those perverted thoughts that we pretend just formed in their minds out of nowhere.

Think about it. When you purposely wear something that you know will make a guy's head turn and his mouth drool, you're causing him to commit adultery against his future wife. It might sound extreme, but look at Matthew 5:28: "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (NIV) Although your future husband probably doesn't know who you are yet, or even if he does, he has a responsibility to remain pure in heart before he gets married (and after, too). But how can he be faithful to you in that way when girls all around him aren't doing anything to help him out and lift him up? When we do the opposite and dress immodestly, willing to show ourselves off in every way, it's like we're going against girls everywhere, encouraging their future husbands to go ahead and think impure thoughts about us, something the future wives would be very hurt with.

Would you want your future husband forming all sorts of impurities in his heart and mind in his head about other girls? I wouldn't, and I doubt you would either. That's why we as a generation of young women have to take on this responsibility more seriously. God is trusting us to do this because He knows that it's not an impossible, or even horrible task. It's a part of being a girl, and a part of God's purpose for your life.

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I'LL SAY IT AGAIN

I'm not finished presenting my case

Haven't convinced you yet? Are you still thinking, *It is not that big a deal! I have the right to dress how I want. Besides, I*



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still don't like the word modesty. It sounds like long dresses and bonnets—something I won't be wearing anytime soon, thank you.

If you're still a little skeptical of the whole modesty thing, ask yourself this question: *Why do I get dressed in the morning, anyways?*

Duh! I get dressed so I'm not walking around naked! OK, so that would be the obvious answer to the first question. But have you ever thought about dressing as something you do to glorify God in your life? It may seem like something so small and irrelevant to a deep and spiritual relationship with God, but it's not. As Christians, our goal in life should be to bring glory to God in every single thing we do, whether it's as small as getting dressed in the morning or deciding whether or not to have sex before marriage.

It does not bring God glory when we dress to show off our bodies. I don't care if God gave you the longest, skinniest legs out there—you still aren't bringing God glory if you only cover six inches of them! However, it does bring glory to God when we dress in a way that we know will not cause a guy's mind to stumble. I think if we really love God with all of our hearts, we would willingly put forth the effort to glorify Him in this way, as small as it may seem.

I think there are two big reasons why girls dress for attention that relate to things I've talked about earlier: 1) they're trying to fill their void with a guy's attention that actually only God can fill and 2) they have a poor self-image in the first place and they want to get a guy to affirm the way they look to boost their confidence (Satan's trap of affirmation). I think that's why it's so important that we make sure we set those things straight in our lives—filling the void with Christ's love and realizing who we are in Him and how He sees us. When these two parts of our lives are in the wrong



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place and out of harmony with God's thinking, it's going to be a lot easier for us to immediately give in to the temptation to dress immodestly to satisfy that desire to fill our emptiness or get an extra boost of self-confidence that comes from a whistling guy.

When you get down to it, it's all about remembering Who we're living for, like Paul did back when I was talking about contentment. He kept the finish line in mind and He never forgot Who gave him each breath, and Who saved him from death. And he always remembered Who it was he was trying to bring glory to: God. When we remember that our ultimate goal in life is to please God and listen to His commands for our lives, it will become an easier thing to bring honor to God when we're choosing the clothes that we wear. And don't forget His two greatest commands: loving Him first and then loving others as we love ourselves. The biggest way to bring God honor when we choose what clothes to buy is choosing clothes that will protect the minds of our brothers in Christ. When we dress this way, it is an outward expression of our love for our Savior!

Dressing modestly is also an outward expression of our love for others, as it helps to protect the guys around, Christian or not, from impurity. Dressing to cause a guy to stumble is not loving at all and goes against God's second greatest commandment. Do we love God? Do we have a passion for His purpose? Is our heart's desire really to follow and please Him? If these things are true, then we will have the love of God in our hearts for others and act on it.

So can we dress modestly while still looking stylish and cute? Of course! Trust me, it's possible! The cutest clothes are not always butt-hugging, midriff-baring and cleavage-exposing. Remember, there's nothing wrong with wearing something cute and looking nice. When we're put together



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in an outfit we really feel good in we feel more confident and there's nothing wrong with that. We just have to stay responsible and be honest when we get ready to go out. Besides, I'm sure I'm not the only one to think that way-too-tight shirts and supershort minis don't look all that cute and flattering anyways. I would much rather be more covered up while flattering my body shape at the same time in a proper way.

Are you willing to let God take control of this area in your life? Are you going to prove trustworthy to God by fighting for the purity of heart and mind of your brothers in Christ? Are you willing to go against the flow of culture and dress to honor God?

My Own Thoughts

Ask yourself these questions and be honest in your answers:

- *Who am I dressing for?*
- *Are there any outfits in my closet that I bought just to get a guy's attention?*
- *Am I willing to get rid of those outfits to honor God?*
- *Is the way I'm dressing now honoring to God?*
- *Have I been taking my responsibility too lightly?*





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- *Why do I dress the way I dress?*
- *Do I have a poor self-image or has God not filled my void, and if so, is it affecting the way I dress?*
- *How can I honor God better when I'm choosing what to buy?*

A QUICK RECAP
Modesty in a nutshell

- In today's world, young women are not encouraged to dress modestly, but rather to look as "sexy" as possible.
- We as young women and girls are told to dress modestly in 1 Timothy 2:9 and we can be sure that God put that in His word for a reason.
- Whether we believe it or not, we *are* responsible to God *and* to guys for what we wear.
- We have the power in our hands to either cause a guy to think lustful thoughts or to encourage a guy to keep his mind pure and we are to use that responsibility to do the latter—out of a love for God and out of the love for our neighbors that God commanded us to possess.
- We can actually view dressing as a way to honor God and bring Him glory—or we can use it to dishonor Him.
- Dressing modestly doesn't mean dressing unattractively, but it means dressing in a way that won't cause a guy to stumble; you can dress modestly and still look stylish!
- We have to remember who we're living for and what our main goal in life is.
- Raise the bar....

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