

the
ACCIDENTAL FEMINIST



RESTORING OUR DELIGHT *in*
GOD'S GOOD DESIGN

Courtney Reissig



“Courtney Reissig is a true daughter of Sarah. She is wise, discerning, brave, and thoughtful. This book is a needed antidote to the false views of women we so often encounter, and too often absorb, in our culture.”

Russell D. Moore, President, The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission; author, *Tempted and Tried*

“*The Accidental Feminist* reminds me of a handbook on womanhood, but not a rule book. Courtney shares the beautiful design of all aspects of women made in the image of God. A perfect read for anyone desiring to gain an understanding of womanhood in the Bible.”

Trillia Newbell, author, *United: Captured by God’s Vision for Diversity and Fear and Faith*

“Courtney writes as a daughter of third-wave feminism who is calling her sisters to return to God’s instructions for how we should live as Christian women in a fallen world. This book unveils what has been lost in our hearts, our relationships, and our churches. It exposes the ‘options’ feminism offers as just a set of heavy shackles designed to hold us back from seeking fulfillment in the only place it can really be found—in the hope of the gospel of Christ.”

Kristie Anyabwile, wife of Thabiti Anyabwile, Assistant Pastor for Church Planting, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC; mom of three; discipler of women

“Over the past few decades, we’ve unwittingly absorbed popular ideas about womanhood. We’ve become feminists without knowing it. Courtney challenges us to wake from the stupor. If you’re a young woman, you would do well to read this book and consider whether you, too, have become an accidental feminist.”

Mary A. Kassian, Professor of Women’s Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Girls Gone Wise in a World Gone Wild*

“Courtney Reissig has written what is sure to become the standard guide to Christian womanhood in a feminist age. Her book is practical, winsome, and full of rich theology. It is particularly strong—and unusual—because the content rests alongside a powerful narrative of personal transformation. Like the Savior it extols, this is a book that is going to strengthen, unsettle, and ultimately bless many readers—and there is nothing accidental about that.”

Owen D. Strachan, Assistant Professor of Christian Theology and Church History, Boyce College; President, The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

“Thoughtful and authentic, Courtney Reissig masterfully uncovers the struggles women have in discovering their identity and purpose. She presents a thorough picture of feminism and the confusion it has wrought regarding the roles of women today and the definition of ‘equality.’ She reveals the true liberation women can experience as they embrace a biblical view of womanhood. Regardless of age or background, *The Accidental Feminist* is a book every woman should read!”

Monica Rose Brennan, Associate Professor and Director of Women’s Ministries, Liberty University

“Being female isn’t just a category; it’s a good gift written in our DNA by a Creator who loves us and is for us. Courtney Reissig affirms this truth from Scripture as well as her own story. Her journey from resisting her design to embracing it with joy is a faithful guide for young Christian women wondering what to make of being female. In a day when *male* and *female* are seen as too confining, when it is said that gender is best bent to the whims of our personal expression, Reissig faithfully shows why being made female, in the image of God, is an exceedingly good gift.”

Candice Watters, Assistant Editor, CMBW.org’s Family Channel; cofounder, Boundless.org; coauthor, *Start Your Family*

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To Daniel,
my best friend, my greatest
supporter, and the love of my life.
Thank you for loving this accidental feminist.

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Acknowledgments

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Writers never write in isolation. Writing is a collaborative experience, and I am blessed by writer friends who sharpen and chal-

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The prevailing theme in my life throughout the writing of this book was unexpected weakness. All I can do is praise God for his grace. This book is a testimony of his strength in my weakness. All glory goes to him alone.

Introduction

I'm an Accidental Feminist

My name is Courtney. I am an accidental feminist.

I never burned my bra or anything, and I liked boys way too much to completely write them off as useless. But for many years I unwittingly possessed some heart attitudes that made me a classic feminist. And I've met many other accidental feminists, both inside and outside the church.

You might be reading this book because you proudly identify yourself with card-carrying feminists. Maybe you think feminism and Christianity aren't mutually exclusive. Welcome, this book is for you.

On the other hand, you might be a Christian woman who is skeptical every time you see the word *feminist*. You want to learn more about what it means to grow as a woman who follows Christ, and you don't really think *feminist* describes you. In fact, in some of your circles *feminist* is a dirty word reserved only for women who do not want a husband or who volunteer at Planned Parenthood. Feminism is most certainly not in your conservative church. This book is for you too.

Or maybe you aren't a skeptic or a feminist. You simply want to learn what it means to be a godly woman in these confusing days. Yes, this book is for you too.

Some Christians define feminism as simply equality among the

sexes. For them, feminism means men and women are equal. As one writer puts it: “At the core, feminism simply consists of the radical notion that women are people, too.”¹ The reality is that feminism is hard to pin down. As the culture has evolved, so has the concept of feminism. We will explore that evolution throughout this book. As postmodernism has taken root in our psyches, the definition of feminism can now mean anything you want it to mean. In fact, as I was writing this introduction, the media was blasting a celebrity for refusing to define herself as a feminist because, as she put it, “I like men.” Some in the media were appalled that she defined feminism so loosely or that she seemed to completely brush off the label. Others acknowledged that to be a feminist today means different things for different people.² This is not your grandmother’s feminism.

For our purposes I am going to define feminism as *equality equals sameness*. I hope you will see what I mean.

Regardless of where you’re coming from, I pray you will find yourself right at home. I know what it’s like to embrace feminism with all of its promises of freedom and independence. I know what it’s like to struggle with feminism—to learn about but not fully adopt its ideas, thinking that there might be something more to the path of being a godly woman. I also know what it’s like to think that feminism no longer has an effect on me. I know what it’s like to want to be a godly woman while being bombarded with images and influences urging me to be the exact opposite.

“But I’m Not a Feminist”

But what if the whole independence deal doesn’t appeal to you at all? Maybe you haven’t struggled with feminism like I did. You might look at feminism and wisely see the baggage it brings to our understanding of womanhood and want nothing to do with it. Many women have this perspective. With the rise of feminism in the 1970s came the countering rise of the biblical womanhood movement. Women like Susan Hunt, Mary Kassian, and Nancy Leigh DeMoss faithfully taught (and continue to teach) God’s Word

on womanhood and stood against the culture's influence. By God's grace, godly women saw what was happening in the culture and sought to live against the fast-moving waters of feminism and independence. But like so many good things, over the years in some circles the definition of *womanhood* has moved from an earnest desire to be different and godly to a list of tasks that even the Proverbs 31 woman couldn't complete.

It's interesting that even outside of the church, younger women are rebelling against the feminism of their mothers. It used to be considered "letting down the team" if a woman chose to stay home with her children rather than launch back into the workplace after her pregnancy. Now many moms are either chucking the career altogether or looking for more flexible options so they can spend the majority of their time with their children.

If we really want to develop our understanding of what it means to be a woman, we have to stop rebelling against each passing generation. If we follow the swinging pendulum of ambient culture, the rebellion will shift in another fifty years or so. But if we anchor ourselves to the Word of God, we will be able to withstand the shifting sands of every generational rebellion.

Miss Independent

I believe many women today find themselves confused, just like I was as an early Christian. Part of my rebellion against things that I deemed too domestic or feminine was rooted in my misunderstanding of what it means to be a Christian woman. What exactly does it look like to be a Christian wife? Is it baking cookies, keeping an immaculate home, and being a mom to five kids? What about the woman who is a baking novice or, like me, a baking failure? Is womanhood only about the quiet and sensitive types? What about the woman who has a career? The woman who can't have kids or simply doesn't want a "quiverful"? What about the woman who doesn't feel gifted to teach in her local church? Is there a place for her? What about the woman who does? Does she fit? What about

the vast number of single women in our churches today? Is there room for these sisters?

Caricatures of womanhood are what get us into trouble. When we reduce womanhood to the tasks we accomplish, or cultural expectations, or talents and personality traits, we are doing a disservice to women everywhere. Recovering from feminism and embracing God's idea of womanhood is far more than a throwback to a 1950s television show.

Before I grasped the gospel and clung to Christ as my Savior, I was the stereotypical, secular millennial feminist. Marriage was low on my priority list. I thought marriage would only interfere with my desire to do what I wanted, which was to be a big-city writer who dated around and dressed fashionably. Children definitely didn't factor into my equation. In my college literary theory class, I devoured feminist thought, fully believing that every story had an angle dealing with the oppression of women. While I enjoyed dating men, I didn't have much respect for them apart from the companionship and attention they provided me. The thought of being barefoot, pregnant, and permanently joined to a man scared me. It wasn't that I didn't like kids. I actually loved them. And I really liked boys (too much, in fact). My fear was that I would be defined by something other than myself. I wanted freedom and independence. I wanted to have a career. I wanted to do something big with my life. Maybe later I would think about kids and a husband. But in my early twenties, I was focused on me and my goals. I wanted to set the pace for my life, and in my mind a husband and children would only slow me down.

You see, I thought freedom meant independence. Independence from men, the burden of children (when I wasn't ready for them), and ultimately from authority. I didn't want anyone else calling the shots in my life, especially if that someone was a man. I thought I could be free only if I was the one who made the decisions for my life. I wanted choices and options. If I chose marriage and children, fine. But I didn't want another person choosing for me. Lack of

independence was akin to being trapped. And I knew I didn't want that for the rest of my life.

What I failed to understand was that true freedom cannot be found in independence from authority at all. True freedom is found in understanding our Creator and how he wants us to live. True freedom is knowing that this world has meaning, and we are created for a purpose. True freedom is knowing that God had a good design when he created us male and female. But it took me a little while to get to the point where I was truly free.

You might hear this part of my story and think, *What's wrong with having goals and wanting to do something with your life? If that's feminism, what's the problem?* I hope you will hang with me.

A Brief History of American Feminism

Feminism started as a movement that aimed to give women options. Good options. At the turn of the twentieth century women couldn't vote, own property, or make independent decisions that many of us take for granted today. It began as a rising up against male authority and male oppression of women. Many of those early feminists were truly oppressed by unfair labor practices and having a limited voice in society. But the movement wasn't just about true oppression, as Carolyn McCulley helpfully asserts in her book *Radical Womanhood: Feminine Faith in a Feminist World*. The *first wave of feminism*, also known as the suffragist movement, cared about additional issues, like the reformation of Christianity and a woman's property rights in marriage.³ For many first-wave feminists, men were a problem. This attitude led to rebellion.

After the initial issues of first-wave feminism were addressed (such as women securing the right to vote), feminism continued to be defined as personal autonomy and freedom from men. Feminists continued to rebel against cultural expectations of women. In the 1950s and 1960s, the rebellion was against the caricature of the "typical" housewife (think June Cleaver). By the 1970s, women were entering the workforce in droves, demanding equal pay for

work, and further seeking to make a mark for themselves as autonomous beings. While some of the advances of *second-wave feminism* were good (equal pay for work, sexual harassment laws in the workplace, etc.), others only widened the dividing line between men and women. Additionally, as feminism of the 70s launched women out of the home and into the workforce, women found purpose and identity outside of a husband and children.

What feminism did was slowly erase the differences between men and women. *Equality now means sameness*. If men and women are truly equal (and I believe they are), then, according to feminism, that equality assumes no distinction in how they live. We've all heard of the saying "anything you can do, I can do better."⁴ Women are on equal footing with men and therefore have the right to do anything they can do. If a woman wants to fight in combat, who is to stop her? If a man wants to be a stay-at-home dad, he's met with high fives and praise for his progressive living. If a little girl wants to play on the same football team as her older brothers, we welcome her with open arms. In today's society, the equality of men and women means there are very few differences when it comes to what they can or should do.

Now that equality means sameness, women are ever trying to break the proverbial glass ceiling. Now that equality means sameness, it doesn't matter who's the leader in a relationship. Now that equality means sameness, women have the freedom to excel and achieve in all that men can do. Like so much of the feminist movement, the good that has come out of it is mixed with bad. Women can vote, own property, and have their own credit cards, but that is not all that feminism accomplished for women. The idea that women have complete control over their own lives is what led to the seminal *Roe v. Wade* case, effectively legalizing abortion-on-demand in America. Like all movements, feminism has had both positive and negative effects.

The feminism of the 70s birthed *third-wave feminism*. In a sort of hyper-rebellion according to the equality-means-sameness no-

tion, this new wave of feminism embraced female sexuality and attempted to use it for women's advantage. This societal movement led to the likes of *Sex and the City*, Miley Cyrus, and the rampant sexuality that we see today. If equality means sameness in feminist thought, then to be equal with men means treating sex like men do, free of emotion and commitment. Or so the thought process goes.

Feminism began as an ideology that promised equality and freedom from the control of men. It has become an ideology that tells women they can use their power, sexuality, and freedom to influence men.

Feminism has gone from a small movement that launched more women into the workforce and gave them the freedom to define themselves to a mainstream ideology that many women are proud to embrace. Ask any woman on the street if she is a feminist and most likely she will either say yes or at least identify strongly with feminist ideals. Feminism is as natural to us as breathing. But we don't always recognize it. Forty years ago women weren't having conversations about leveraging their femininity to get ahead in their careers. Women weren't trying to have a husband, kids, and a growing career all at once like they are now. And they definitely weren't trying to do it all with a smile on their face. Feminism showed women that they had more options. And as their options grew more vast and diverse, so did their desires. It used to be that to be a feminist meant putting off your desire for family and a home life if you were going to make something of yourself. Now it doesn't. Now women truly can "have it all" without giving up their identity. Feminism has become whatever you want it to be. This is why a stay-at-home mom can proudly call herself a feminist just as much as the female executive running a company can. Feminism is so fluid now. But what has stayed the same is the idea that women should have choices. Women should be able to be independent if they want to be. Their lives should not be dictated by culture or stereotypes.

I embraced feminist ideology, not necessarily the feminist movement. I didn't make it my mission to advance feminist causes and

see feminism expand in the world, but I did believe in the general premise of feminism. I wanted autonomy. I wanted independence. I can still hear myself telling my college boyfriend, “Don’t you tell me what to do. I can make my own decisions.” While I had no business listening to him for many other reasons, my point in defying him was that I was a woman and I was my own deciding voice. Again, I thought freedom meant independence. I wanted that freedom. I liked the idea of defining my own identity. I wanted to be the master of my own destiny. This drive for independence was the key aspect of feminism that I bought hook, line, and sinker. As an unbeliever, I believed that depending on a man meant giving up my dreams for a career and future. Even as a new Christian, I held on to this fear. But—as a small concession—I picked a slightly more religious career to pour my energy into. I wanted to do something I defined as meaningful, and keeping a home and raising a family was not on my list of world-changing life goals.

Though my actions and thinking as a young Christian had all the marks of feminism, I wouldn’t have labeled myself as a feminist. In fact, if you had asked me if I was a feminist, I probably would have responded with little more than indifference. I knew that I was a feminist preconversion, but I didn’t really care once I became a Christian. For many women in my generation, feminism as a movement seems tired and old. It’s the movement of a world of yesterday. And that is how feminism has become a part of us. Very few women are talking about being card-carrying feminists today, but the reality is that many women live willfully free from authority. Many women buy into the idea that *equality means sameness*—even if they do so in the slightest of ways. As human beings, we have been fighting authority since the first sin was committed in the garden. And this only makes it harder to submit to the One who has authority over everything—God.

In fact, the more I have gotten to know women my age (in their thirties) and younger, the more I’ve realized that most of us think feminism is some far-away ideology that doesn’t really pertain to us.

Or if we are aware of it, we don't understand how it influences us as Christian women.

A Feminist Where You Least Expect Her

We need to understand a common misconception about feminists. Are you ready for it? Feminist thinking isn't found only outside the church. It's within the church. It's within *my* thinking. It's within yours too.

Maybe you have grown up in the church, and you never once consciously desired independence from men or God. Or maybe you are quite the opposite. You are still in the throes of wrestling through what it means to live as a Christian woman in the wake of your feminist upbringing. Or maybe you are somewhere in the middle, and you don't know exactly what you think.

No matter what your experience, the reality is that everyone has questioned God and his character. We have all wondered if what he has said about us as women, human beings, and image-bearers is true. We have all asked the question, "Did God actually say . . . ?"

Sound familiar? A lady named Eve thought the same thing (Genesis 3). If we are going to make any progress in understanding what it means to be a woman in this crazy world we live in, we must first understand that we come from the same stock.

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, we have been in a battle of the sexes, but—more importantly—we have been in a battle against our Creator. Fast forward to the twenty-first century and we have a full-fledged movement behind us. For those of us born after the 1970s, we don't know a world where "girl power" isn't popular and the culture of hypersexuality is not the norm. Feminism is in our bones now, and many of us do not even know it.

Feminist ideology is not relegated to the brash Gloria Steinem types, or even the female executive with the corner office. Rather, feminism rises up in ordinary women in our congregations, homes, and in the least obvious place, the mirror. Feminism is in the core of our hearts apart from the saving work of the shed

blood of Christ, and not simply because we are militant against male authority, but primarily because we are opposed to the greatest authority of all—our Creator. The feminist is not some abstract woman “out there.” She is staring at us every morning when we put on our makeup. We are all feminists in need of recovery. We have all shaken our fists at God and wanted something different from his good design for us.

Where We Are Headed

These are weighty matters. These are unpopular matters too. As I was writing this book, I took a short writing retreat to finish a couple of chapters. When I checked into my hotel, the woman at the front desk asked me the customary question to guests: “What brings you to stay with us tonight?”

I froze. I could feel my heart begin to race as I thought how to answer her question. A slew of responses raced through my mind.

“I’m just here on business.” Not exactly the truth, but not a lie either.

“I’m just having my first night away from my twin boys.” Again, not a lie. But not the full truth.

In the brief moments between her question and my answer, conviction hit me. Perhaps God was giving me this test so I would talk about him and not myself. So I fumbled my answer.

“I’m here to work on a book,” I said nervously, secretly hoping she would leave it at that. She didn’t.

“What’s your book about?”

Great. Now I have to say the weirdest part of all. I swallowed my pride, silently repented, and asked for the words to say:

“I’m writing a book on God’s plan for us as women. How he created us and has a design for us.”

She didn’t seem too interested, and that was the end of it, but the experience revealed something about my own heart and this issue in our culture. Being a woman who believes that God knew what he was doing when he made us male and female is not going

to move you to the top of the popular list. Following Christ never does, does it? But it does bring joy.

Our understanding of who God created us to be as women has everything to do with our display of him to a watching world. We will explore this more in chapter 1. Regardless of the flippant endorsements of feminism all around us, our task is anything but flippant. It has eternal implications for our own lives and how we reflect the image of God in this world. God had a good design for us when he created us, and our sinful hearts have been distorting that design ever since the fall.

We are not part of a rebellion against a generation gone by. We aren't thumbing our noses at the feminists of our mother's generation. Rather, we desire full-fledged restoration to what God intended for us from the very beginning. Ecclesiastes tells us that there is nothing new under the sun (1:9). Feminism, while it may seem like a new concept, is really an ideology of the oldest kind.

So I hope you will join me in the chapters ahead as I talk about what being an accidental feminist looks like. In chapter 1, we will see that God had a plan in mind when he created us as male and female, and we will begin to understand how that relates to our standing as image-bearers. The fact that you were created female matters. Chapter 2 examines the impact feminism has on our relationships with men and children, and how the Bible views our relationships with them, regardless of our marital status. Chapter 3 takes the relationship aspect further and looks at God's design for marriage. We cover heavy topics like headship and submission and why marriage is a good thing. Then we move on to our bodies and beauty in chapter 4. We will explore the usual things like purity and modesty, but we will also see that beauty and body image are not defined by our culture, men, or magazines, but by the God who made us in his image. In chapter 5 we will look at the home and why the Bible's command for a woman to be busy at home matters. This is not just a chapter for married, soon-to-be-married, or want-to-be-married women. I hope you will see how God's design

for the home is one that transcends marital status. One of the common arguments regarding gender is that if a woman is gifted to lead and preach, then she should be given the opportunity to do so. Some might look down on ministries in the nursery, kitchens, and quiet corners of the church. I hope you will see in chapter 6 that the local church is a place for true human flourishing, men and women alike. Living out our true callings as men and women would not be possible without the gospel. Our ability to live as Christian women hinges on the atoning work of Christ on our behalf. In chapter 7 we consider how Christ's work is our promised hope for living according to his calling on our lives.

Each chapter provides an opportunity to apply restoration to your own life. These sections help you work through the material and make practical applications in light of your season in life. In addition each chapter includes practical examples at the end, along with study questions that can be answered with a group or on your own. My prayer is that this book would be a fruitful experience in your growth as a Christian.

I'm not making any new, innovative claims about womanhood. I'm not going to try to be hip and cool. The truth is, I don't have anything to give you other than the Word of God. And that's really all that matters at the end of the day. God's Word has a lot to say to us as women. It's clear. It's true. And it holds everything we need to know in order to live in this crazy world. I pray that we will all be more conformed to the image of Christ as we learn how he created us to be.

My Body on Display

If you have ever worked in the restaurant industry, or are familiar with the lifestyle, you know that it is hardly a place where Christ is glorified. Late nights, fast cash, and transient people often are a recipe for hard living and all that goes along with it. That was my life before Jesus found me.

I worked as a waitress and bartender in college. In the particular restaurant where I worked, the men had a special signal for when an attractive woman walked through the front door. A bartender would ring the bell in the bar. At the first chime, virtually every male server, bartender, and yes, even the managers, would stop what they were doing to partake of the eye candy, unbeknownst to the woman who came to dine and much to the chagrin of every female server, bartender, and manager. It was a Mexican restaurant, and we all had to dress the part. So as you can imagine, the female employees were hardly a match for the street-clothes wearing women who came to be waited on. Something about Mexican-themed clothing and hair that smells of fajitas just doesn't make you bell-ringing material.

This had an effect on me. Whenever I came in on my days off, I wanted to be that girl that solicited a good bell-ringing. I knew what it took, so I dressed the part. I wanted attention. I wanted love. And I wanted to be deemed the prettiest in the place—at least for that moment. I wanted the bell to ring for me.

Third-Wave Feminism and Our Bodies

Something happened in feminist thinking in the mid-1990s. Feminism used to be about protecting women from predatory men. This was why conservatives and feminists could often find themselves on the same side of many issues. As pornography sought a foothold in society, for example, both sides joined forces to fight porn and its impact on women. Such collaboration, however, now rarely occurs.

You might not identify as a third-wave feminist, or really know anyone who does, but you most likely have been exposed to it in some capacity.

Ever heard of *Sex and the City*? The popular HBO television show of the late 90s/early 2000s was in many ways a face of third-wave feminism. The show thrived on the boisterous sex lives of four female New York City friends. The women had varying levels of standards and morality, but the point was that they each got to choose their own standards. According to third-wave feminists, men have defined sexuality for women for too long. Women should, and now do, have the right to own and control their bodies and their sexuality. If a woman wants to ask a man out and sleep with him on the first date, she has that right. If a woman wants to flaunt her body through revealing clothing, it's her right. And consider the common refrain of the abortion movement: no one has the right to tell a woman what she can or cannot do with her own body. Sexual freedom as defined by third-wave feminism was the last great frontier for women's issues. A quick survey of the covers of recent women's magazines reveals our attitudes toward sexuality today (these are ones suitable for reprint):

- “Learn the Secrets He Is Afraid to Tell You but Secretly Wants in Bed”
- “How to Be Sexy for Your Man”
- “10 Beauty Tips That Will Make You Look Like a Celebrity”

In many ways, beauty is now synonymous with sex. Because sex sells and helps women get ahead, beauty is now defined by our

sexuality. As Christian women, we know there is a better definition of beauty, one that is not defined by sexuality or a changing culture. It is defined by God.

Third-wave feminism was perfectly poised to emerge in a post-modern society, where truth, gender, and sexuality no longer find their meaning in absolutes. You may not even realize it, but the complete redefinition of sexuality, gender, and morality is in part a product of third-wave feminism. Freedom of choice now means the freedom to choose any expression of love and morality—and not be judged for it.

One of the lasting impacts of third-wave feminism is that sex is now the power tool that women wield to show their equality and identity. In a recent interview concerning her brash nudity on the show *Girls*, Lena Dunham defended her choice to shed it all for the cameras as exactly that—her choice.

In the moment, Dunham herself spoke clearly about her position on the nudity, saying it is “a realistic expression of what it’s like to be alive. But I totally get it. If you’re not into me, that’s your problem and you’re going to have to work that out with professionals,” she retorted. And later, fellow EP Jenni Konner interrupted her response to another question to add, “I literally was spacing out because I’m in such a rage spiral about that guy,” she said pointing to the question-asker. “I was just looking at him and going into this rage [over] this idea that you would talk to a woman like that and accuse a woman of showing her body too much. The idea it just makes me sort of sick.”¹

To suggest that women should follow a particular standard of modesty, morality, or ethics regarding their own bodies is offensive (even to the point of being sickening) to this budding generation of feminists.

Dunham is not alone. Jessica Valenti, a prominent figure in third-wave feminism, has made it her mission to dismantle the abstinence and purity argument, citing that it actually makes girls more promiscuous and places unfair attention on the girls as the

responsible party. In her book *The Purity Myth*, she says this about what she calls “the lie of virginity”: “It’s time to teach our daughters that their ability to be good people depends on their being good people, not on whether or not they are sexually active.”²

She goes on to say: “It’s high time to do away with outdated—and dangerous—notions of virginity. If young women’s only ethical gauge is based on whether they’re chaste, we’re ensuring that they will continue to define themselves by their sexuality.”³ Valenti is right to some degree. Like second-wave feminists before her, she rightly asserts that women should not find their identity in sexuality, virginity, or anything else. But in her quest to rescue women from the so-called “purity myth,” she makes morality fluid.

In her book, *Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman’s Guide to Why Feminism Matters*, Valenti says that feminism says you own your sexuality. No one else can shame you for what you do with your body. She writes, “Feminism tells you it’s okay to make decisions about your sexuality *for yourself*. Because when it comes down to it, what’s more powerful and important than being able to do what you want with your body without fear of being shamed or punished?”⁴

The Modesty Wars

It’s true that many Christians also argue that heralding purity as a biblical quality places undue pressure on women, and sometimes they’ve argued this point for good reason. Purity, modesty, and abstinence are not only a woman’s problem. For those who profess godliness, they are everyone’s challenge. The Bible leaves no person untouched in its standards for holiness and purity; God commands everyone to be holy because he is holy (Lev. 20:26).

If we are honest, the whole modesty debate can be more than a little divisive. Maybe you have been hurt by someone’s criticism of your choice of clothing. You think, *My body is my own, right? Isn’t it unfair for someone else to impose her standards about skirt length, pant tightness, and bathing suit choices on me?* Or maybe

you think modesty is strictly a man's problem. If men would control their sexual impulses to lust, then women could dress however they like.

Right after I graduated from college, I lived in a house with four other girls. It was one of the best times of my life. Whenever one of us would prepare to leave the house, we would state the popular mantra "modest is hottest" to each other, implying that proper coverage was the key to a man's heart and attraction to us. Of course, we were joking. Most of my roommates grew up in a conservative Christian subculture that praised covering up and reviled the opposite. So we were all navigating our way through what pleased God regarding our clothes. I learned a lot from my roommates in those years.

Because God saved me out of a hypersexualized lifestyle, my quest for modesty often led me toward legalism. I knew what it was to entice the eyes of men to lust after me, so I was terrified of falling back into the same sin. I was reluctant to show my body in *any* way, even if what I wore would be considered modest by the most conservative among us. My roommates provided me a helpful place to process those emotions and fears. We all were coming from less than biblical backgrounds.

Modesty in the Shadow of the Fall

Within the Christian subculture, the pendulum has swung to both ends of the modesty spectrum over the years. Some have said that the current modesty talk is actually causing women to feel shame over their bodies, when in fact God made the female body beautiful.⁵ Is this perception accurate?

The Bible never presents modesty as a covering for the shame of a woman's body. God created men and women in his image, and this means he created a woman's body for his glory. The Song of Solomon, written by a man who is very attracted to his future wife's body, is full of vivid imagery. God created a woman's body to be visually appealing to a man, but not just any man. Within

the beautiful love story of Song of Solomon we find these careful words: “Do not awaken love before its appropriate time” (2:7; 3:5; 8:4 HCSB). There is a time and place for enjoying the wife of your youth. God never presents a woman’s body as shameful, distasteful, or something to keep hidden, but he does give parameters for how we are to view it.

Any discussion of modesty and purity (or simply life in general) must carry with it an understanding of what it means to live in this fallen world. It is true that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). It is also true that our bodies bring glory to God (v. 20). But part of that glory is only meant to be seen and experienced within the covenant of marriage. Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed precisely because of the covenant (Gen. 2:25). It was only when, and immediately after, the covenant was marred by sin that they frantically tried to cover their nakedness (3:7).

As I was preparing to get married, the dress shop owner where I bought my wedding dress recounted how she had just helped a high school student find a prom dress. The result, I was told, was that the girl looked amazing in her prom dress. She had chosen a tight, strapless minidress for the event, and the owner remarked that this girl had “a body to die for.” In her mind, the girl had it, and she deserved to flaunt it. Tragically, this is our culture’s common response to a woman’s body. Beauty is defined by our sexuality. The notion of covering up or reserving your body for one man sounds like a foreign language to our culture of excess and sexual aggression. What the shop owner was saying was classic third-wave feminism language, whether she knew it or not. If a woman has an attractive figure, then it only seems right that she show off the assets she has been afforded. It makes less sense in the eyes of our culture to cover up. And it is even more unheard of to allow someone else to make that decision for you. Modesty to our culture is seen as embarrassment over what we have been given, namely our bodies. But to God modesty is actually respecting what we have been given and protecting what God has deemed

private and not for public consumption. The culture links beauty with sexuality, flaunting your body with freedom. These are all distortions of true beauty.

For Christians, covering up is not about shame or embarrassment over our bodies. God is not ashamed of our bodies. He created us. But we live in a post-Genesis 3 world, where we are no longer “naked and unashamed.” Every morning when we put on clothing, it is a reminder that things are not as they should be. We can’t go back to the perfection of Eden, and many displays of our body are not glorifying to God simply because they reveal what God has seen fit to cover.

John Piper has this to say about modesty in the shadow of the fall:

You are not what you were and you are not what you ought to be. The chasm between what you are and what you ought to be is huge. Covering yourself with clothing is a right response to this—not to conceal it, but to confess it. Henceforth, you shall wear clothing, not to conceal that you are not what you should be, but to confess that you are not what you should be. One practical implication of this is that public nudity today is not a return to innocence but rebellion against moral reality. God ordains clothes to witness to the glory we have lost, and it is added rebellion to throw them off.⁶

Our discussions surrounding modesty must consider that *God* clothes Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21). He saw fit to cover their nakedness, not because he was ashamed of their bodies, but because part of their glory had been lost when they sinned. Like everything around us, things are not as they were intended to be. Modesty is more than simply covering up certain body parts. It is a declaration that this world is not all God intended it to be. God is the one who clothes us, and makes us modest.

Modesty matters precisely because we live in a post-Genesis 3 world. Everyone is telling a story about their relationship to God by what they choose to wear (or not to wear).

Purity in an Impure World

Just like modesty is a hot (or unpopular) topic in our culture, purity is equally divisive. You probably hear it all the time from teachers, parents, pastors, friends—purity is important. God wants you to stay pure. Don't have sex until you are married. Maybe you made a purity pledge and wore a ring to symbolize your commitment. Or maybe you live a double life, acting like you follow the purity commitment while secretly going against what you say you believe. Maybe you just don't care. You have heard all of this before, and think the purity path is a really boring and outdated way to live.

But like modesty, purity also is God's idea. Therefore, any understanding of purity must first begin with a right understanding of God. We are to be holy because God is holy. God is pure, holy, and good. If we are in Christ, and children of God, we should want nothing less than what he himself already is. Christians do not see purity as a burden but as a joy (Ps. 51:10; Matt. 5:8).

The problem is that so many of us want to know how far we can go. We want to know how much is too much. Where's the line and how close can I get to it? We are faced with a dilemma. We want the attention of the world, but not too much. We want the bell to ring for us, but we're offended when it does. We ask those questions because we are pulled by the world's understanding of sex and beauty. It seems fun. It seems adventurous and freeing. But God never takes us there. He gives us one simple command: "I am holy, and if you are my people, you are to be holy like me." But what is our problem with that command? So many of us try to be holy on our own; we try on our own to fit into God's standards for morality, only to be crushed by those standards time and time again. We can't do the very thing he commands us to do. How many times have you thought, I am not going to cuss anymore. I am not going to watch those kinds of movies again. I am not going to lie anymore. I am not going to have sex with that guy, or send a sexual text message, or flirt with the guys at school or work. I'm not going to fantasize about the man I saw at the store. How many

times have you sinned and woken up the next day feeling like a failure because you just can't stop doing it? I know I have thought those same regretful thoughts. We hear the command that sexual immorality must not even be "named" among us (Eph. 5:3), and we shudder at what impure thoughts come across our minds. To understand what it means to be pure and holy, we must understand God. And to understand God we need Jesus to cleanse us from our sin. If we are truly honest, our lives often are Romans 7 on display. The good we want to do we don't, and vice versa.

Purity is not a list of rules to be followed. It is not a ring to be worn or a card to be signed. It is a lifestyle (Titus 2:4–5). It is a lifestyle of a person who has been bought with Christ's blood and loves God the Father. It is a lifestyle of war, where we daily flee from sin (1 Cor. 6:18). God is not pleased with a "cleaned-up act." The Bible tells us that even our good deeds are like filthy rags to God because we have been stained by sin (Isa. 64:6).

God's Design for Sex

Once we have a right understanding of God, we need to then understand how God created us. God created us as sexual beings. Sex was his idea. In Genesis 2:18–24 we see that God created Eve for Adam, and they were one flesh. It was not good for Adam to be alone, the text tells us. God created them distinctly different, and he created them for each other. But unfortunately sin marred what God created to be good. Sex is distorted, and the result is a world now filled with all forms of perversions of what God designed sex to be. Third-wave feminism says that we get to define sex. Sex is for us and about us. Our impulses and our pleasures rule us. But that is not what God says.

God designed women to desire intimacy with a man. Part of being human is having sexual desires. We do not check them at the door when we become Christians. Consider, for example, the woman in Song of Solomon, who was eager to have sex with her future husband (Song 1:2; 2:3, 5; 4:16; 5:16; 7:11; 8:14). But God

has given us parameters for his good gift of sex. We can enjoy his gift fully, but we can also make his gift a destructive force in our lives. This gift is only to be experienced within the bounds of a marriage between one man and one woman. Anything outside of these boundaries is outside of God's design. And if God is calling you to be married some day, then any sexual experience with someone else before your wedding day is outside of God's design as well. God wants you to be holy because he is holy. He loves you and wants what is best for you.

In Song of Solomon, the married woman urges the single women around her to not arouse her desires until it is time. Throughout the entire book she pleads with the young maidens to abstain from awakening desires that are not ready to be awakened. It is not simply about "having sex." It is about giving yourself over to the desires that are intended only for your future husband. There is the right timing for this gift. Just because God gave you desires does not mean you get to act on them. The entire Christian life is about waiting and patience. We are not free to do as we please. Tim Keller has this to say about God's design for sex:

To call the marriage "one flesh," then, means that sex is understood as both a sign of that personal, legal union and a means to accomplish it. The Bible says don't unite with someone physically unless you are also willing to unite with the person emotionally, personally, socially, economically, and legally. Don't become physically naked and vulnerable to the other person without becoming vulnerable in every other way, because you have given up your freedom and bound yourself in marriage.

Then, once you have given yourself in marriage, sex is a way of maintaining and deepening that union as the years go by. . . . Indeed, sex is perhaps the most powerful God-created way to help you give your entire self to another human being. Sex is God's appointed way for two people to reciprocally say to one another "I belong completely, permanently, and exclusively to you." You must not use sex to say anything less.⁷

Isn't that the exact opposite of how our culture defines sex and marriage? Sex in our culture is shown to be most freeing, most exhilarating, and most enjoyable outside of marriage, not within it.

In light of the fact that we are to be holy because God is holy, and in light of the fact that sex is a good thing, how are we supposed to live?

Let's get some help from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is an Old Testament book of wisdom, and many of the proverbs were written by King Solomon for his son. Throughout the book, we frequently see him pleading with his son to listen to his words. He has experienced the effects of sin. He knows what he is talking about. And he has wisdom for us today in how to live as pure women. Proverbs 5–7 is a plea to flee sexual immorality. Solomon is begging with his son to run from the forbidden woman.

This woman's life leads to death and destruction for all who come in contact with her (Prov. 5:1–14). But what is she doing? She is a woman who is set on leading men into adultery. She uses her sexuality to lure men away from their wives and their purity.

The Forbidden Woman versus Lady Wisdom

The contrast between the woman of Proverbs 7 and the woman of wisdom in the book of Proverbs is striking. If we are going to live as biblical women in a feminist world, we should pay careful attention to Solomon's words about a woman who walks in wisdom and the cautions he provides about the woman who doesn't. It's not hard to see that some things never change, even many centuries later. Notice five characteristics about this "forbidden woman."

1. She is dressed as a prostitute (Prov. 7:10). Her clothing communicates that she is sexually available to men. Modesty is not simply about covering up your body; it is about a desire for attention. Women are tempted by the lust to be lusted after. We want the bell to ring for us. But outside of marriage, any man's desire for us is sinful.

2. She makes herself available to everyone (Prov. 7:11–12). She goes to the streets, the market, and anywhere she knows men will be. She is loud and makes herself known. Are you this type of woman? Do you make yourself available to every guy who comes in contact with you? Do you call, text, and flirt with the guys in your school, church, or workplace? Faithfulness to one man begins before you say “I do” and continues until one of you takes that final breath.
3. Not only does she make herself available, she also uses her immodesty and availability to lure men to her (Prov. 7:13–18, 21). She is thinking only about her own temporary pleasure and gain.
4. She is married and using her husband’s time away as an opportunity to commit adultery (Prov. 7:19–20). No matter what your circumstance right now, if you are impure with a man who is not your husband—even if it is your boyfriend and you say you love him—you are living like the forbidden woman. The reality is that if he is not your husband right now, he very well could be someone else’s husband someday—and you could be someone else’s future wife. Even if you do end up marrying him someday, you have awakened desire “before its appropriate time.” You are operating outside of God’s good design, therefore it is sin. And if you are married, you are just as susceptible to the forces of attraction as those who are single. If you are not careful to protect your emotions and thoughts, you could very easily slip into temptation to turn from your husband and lust after another man.
5. Her actions lead men into death (Prov. 7:22–23). Succumbing to lust can cost a man his life, and it can cost a woman her life as well. Impurity today might not lead to your immediate physical death, but it will ultimately be your destruction.

Those in Christ should not desire to be like the forbidden woman—even if all you see around you are women who live this way. Thankfully, God is kind to tell us how to live pure lives as women. Proverbs repeatedly talks about Lady Wisdom and encour-

ages the believer in Jesus to follow her example. If you want to be a woman of wisdom, consider these examples.

1. Lady Wisdom's beauty is inward, not outward (Prov. 31:30). It's not wrong to want to look attractive. But a woman's clothing should not be her primary focus (1 Pet. 3:3–4). We should not dress to make ourselves the primary attraction. Christian women should desire to make Christ the main attraction. When we dress immodestly, we take away from Christ's glory. By being lusted after, we are getting glory and attention for ourselves, not the One who made us.

I enjoy shopping, and I enjoy doing my hair and makeup in the morning. I don't like going out without makeup on, although now that I have young kids I sometimes forego makeup for the sake of ease. I try to pay attention to the latest fashions. These things are not wrong in themselves. But if I leave my house thinking, *I hope everyone loves my outfit. I hope that person notices me*, then I have misplaced desires. Remember my story about being a waitress? I shouldn't want anyone other than my husband ringing a bell for me. My body is not an object of affection for everyone in Little Rock—and neither is yours for your town. One practical way that we can love our brothers in Christ (and all men) is to be mindful of what we wear. Men are visually stimulated. They are designed to want to look at a woman's body. And we are designed to want them to. But our bodies are only for one man in the covenant of marriage.

2. Lady Wisdom makes herself available to one man (Prov. 31:23, 28). God never intended for us to be serial daters. The Bible does not give us a framework for the dating culture that we have today. We were made to enjoy intimacy, both emotional and physical, with one man—our husband. In Genesis 2, we see that Eve was made for Adam. She was made to complete him. Flirting and tempting guys with your affections and your body opens doors for intimacy with them.
3. Lady Wisdom is faithful (Prov. 31:11–12). Godly women know that engaging in any sexual activity with a man before marriage

is committing adultery against her future husband. Jesus says in Matthew 5:28 that if one has even looked at a woman lustfully, he has committed adultery. And if you tempt a man to lust after you, whether by your physical actions with him or your physical appearance, you have tempted him to commit adultery. It is important to note that it takes two people to lust in this situation—the person lusting and the one causing the lusting. Men are not off the hook for their lustful thoughts, but as a woman you can help them in this battle by dressing in a way that honors God and them. And if you look lustfully at a guy, or a girl, you have committed the same sin. The godly woman knows that God’s Word is true and that marriage to one man is the only faithful way to express sexuality.

4. Lady Wisdom is life-giving (Prov. 31:13–16, 18–20, 27). In Genesis 3:20, Adam names his wife *Eve* as the “mother of all living.” As we’ve already talked about, women are given the task of being life-givers. We are to bear and nurture life in all settings, no matter our age. The forbidden woman’s life leads to death for all who come in contact with her. But the godly woman labors hard to cultivate life in the people around her. Do not be a source of death for the brothers in your life. Encourage them in their walk with the Lord and their fight against lust by your appearance, your actions, and your relationship with them.

If you have failed in any of these areas, there is hope! The impurity of today does not need to be the final word in your life. If you find yourself broken over your sexual immorality, a fountain of grace is available for you at the cross of Christ. He was destroyed so you don’t have to be if you simply trust him through repentance and faith.

True Beauty

We live in a culture that is obsessed with image, and every day advertisements bombard us with promises to deliver beauty and happiness. Many of us struggle to leave the house content because of

the constant anxiety we feel over looking “beautiful enough.” With all of the hype surrounding being beautiful, we must ask ourselves, What exactly is beauty? Every day we are faced with a choice: Will we choose worldly beauty, defined by fashion magazines and the culture? Or will we choose godly beauty, defined by the perfect, holy words of our God?

As Christians, we can have a love/hate relationship with beauty. We want to guard against worldliness, so we minimize beauty. Or we swing too far the other way and think it doesn’t matter how we think about beauty. But the Bible is not silent on the subject of beauty. And if we are going to make any headway in recovering from the influences of feminism, we must learn what God has to say about beauty and our bodies.

In their book, *True Beauty*, Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Whitacre define beauty in this way: “True beauty is to behold and reflect the beauty of God.”⁸

They go on to say that God is the author of beauty and he is the truly beautiful one. By creating us in his image, he gave us his beauty. When we behold him, the one who made us and loves us, we are reflecting his beauty.

Because we were created in God’s image, we were made to desire and notice beauty. When we see a precious new baby or a beautiful man or woman, we acknowledge such beauty because God is the Creator of these things. The entire book of Song of Solomon is full of references to both the man and the woman’s praise of the beauty of the other. The biblical authors even made mention of beautiful people like Sarah (Gen. 12:11), Rachel (Gen. 29:17), Joseph (Gen. 39:6), David (1 Sam. 16:12), Absalom (2 Sam. 14:25), the woman who tended to King David before he died (1 Kings 1:4), and Esther (Est. 2:7).

We know that there were beautiful women in the Bible. And we know that God is the author of beauty. But it’s critical to remember that outward beauty is not everything. Being beautiful is not a sin, but, for example, if Esther had sought her own gain and refused to

help her people, her beauty would have meant nothing. And though Sarah was beautiful, she probably would have traded her beauty for a baby. Absalom's beauty led to pride, and his downfall (2 Sam. 18:9–15). And Joseph's beauty landed him in jail, falsely accused (Gen. 39:1–23).

Everything around us is a reminder that we cannot trust in external beauty. All of us are subject to the natural process of aging. And even in our youthfulness, we could all probably confess that many times our daily date with the mirror leaves much to be desired.

There is no arguing that women want to be beautiful. Beauty is a gift, and I will be the first to admit that I want to be beautiful just as much as the next girl. But I also must recognize that if my hope is in my designer hair straightener and my Great Lash mascara, I will end up disappointed and discontent. There is a healthy balance between being feminine and making the products of femininity an idol.

When you and I walk out of our homes, we face a barrage of self-criticism and comparison to others around us. And it's easy when we walk into a group of women for our first reaction to be judging the beauty of those around us, even to the point of gossip: "Did you see what she was wearing?" We must repent of such things.

Unless we see that all of our comparisons and self-criticisms are fundamentally prideful and that they express unbelief in God, we will spend our entire lives never feeling good enough—and that is a worldview that will ultimately lead us to death. When women bury themselves in a sea of credit card debt just to buy the newest designer style, they are at their core saying, "God is not really God. The praise of others is." Hugging a cold toilet after forcing oneself to throw up is fundamentally saying, "God does not meet my needs, and he is not sovereign over my weight." Obsession with image, no matter how detrimental it is to your health or well-being, is a form of pride and self-worship—just like all of our disbelief is pride and self-worship.

We can, and should, recognize beautiful, modest, godly women when we see them. But we should not hope in those affirmations in our own life. Our mood should not rise or fall with compliments about our dress or new shoes. And, most importantly, our characterization of beauty must not come from the latest issue of *InStyle* magazine.

If the Lord allows us to live until we are eighty years old, few will remember the face of our 20s, 30s, or 40s. All they will see is the wrinkled face of a woman nearing the end of her life. As we prepare to meet our Savior, no amount of Botox or fad diet will prepare us for our final breath. Only a life spent pouring over the mirror of God's Word will prepare us for that glorious day.

It's easy to pay lip service to the truths of the Bible, yet still live in constant anxiety and unbelief. The fight of faith is hard. If you feel yourself struggling with true beauty versus worldly beauty, ask God to reveal the areas in your life that need to be changed. Preach the gospel to yourself daily. If you find yourself anxious about how you look in the morning, proclaim Christ to your wayward heart. Do not choose bondage to the world's ideals any longer—choose life in Christ. Let us not be ashamed to recognize true beauty when we see it, but put our hope in Jesus's blood and righteousness, lest we think on that final day that it's our trendy outfits and size 2 bodies that will save us.

Beauty Points to the Creator

God has created every inch of the universe, every cloud in the sky, and every hair on your head. Your understanding of beauty must first be rooted in a proper theology of God. If God created all things, then the created things should reflect the Creator—God himself. And if beauty is truth, then all things, to be truly beautiful, must point to the ultimate truth—God, himself.⁹

Beauty is defined by the One who created beauty. Do you purchase new shoes, or get your hair cut, or buy makeup to put Christ on display, or for man's empty praise?

Some Christians might think that beauty is something to be avoided. But if God created the earth and saw that it was very good (Gen. 1:31), then we must believe that he didn't create it ugly and call it good. Why are we drawn to things that are attractive, if God does not want things to be beautiful? It is our fallen nature that distorts true beauty. God created us with a desire for things beautiful because he wants us to worship him. When we divorce beauty from God, we live in an endless cycle of trying to meet the newest standard of beauty, from plastic surgery to cosmetics that promise to make us look years younger and have flawless skin. Beauty becomes about us, rather than the Creator—and it is never enough.

So how does this affect our relationship with the mirror and closet? If your shirt is drawing more attention to body parts than your person, you are not declaring the beauty and truth of Christ. If you want your outfit to draw more attention to your impeccable style than your heart for Jesus, it is not declaring true beauty. We should want to be beautiful, but not so we can win pageant awards, a host of boyfriends, or the compliments of our friends. We should want to be beautiful because we want people to see our Christ.

Peter addressed this in 1 Peter 3:3: “Do not let your adornment be external—the braiding of hair, and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear.” As Mahaney and Whitacre said, true beauty is beholding and reflecting God, which is what Peter is getting at. Our lives should be about worshiping God in everything and pointing back to him in all we do. As I said in chapter 3, this hidden beauty is a gentle and quiet spirit—a resolute hope in the God who holds our life together. This is how we reflect inner beauty.

Now surely Peter is not telling us to forego clothing. He isn't. Rather, he is saying that our outward appearance should not define us, and most certainly it should not be a distraction in worship and daily living. There is much freedom in Christ regarding makeup use, hairstyles, and clothing. But all of these things should seek a common purpose—displaying the glory of Christ. Christians, of all

people, should be the most beauty-seeking people in society because we know the real source and definition of beauty.

The heavens are not silent—they are declaring the glory of God (Ps. 19:1). Is your appearance declaring the same thing? Do you seek to point people to Jesus, or to your newest dress? May your lives and appearance declare the same thing—Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Finding Pleasure in God Alone

Perhaps you don't see a problem with your impurity. You are happy to continue with your life of sexual immorality because you don't really see anything wrong with it. You enjoy the pleasure and attention it affords you. You like the clothes you wear and feel empowered when you leave the house. But is it really satisfying you? If you were honest with yourself, would you be able to say that it is enough? The reason why you go back to your boyfriend, or back to self-pleasing, or back to flirting is because you can't get enough. Third-wave feminism promises that your body is your own and you can do whatever you like with it, consequence free. But the Bible tells a different story. You were designed to receive maximum fulfillment in Jesus only, and the very fact that you keep going back to your sin even though you feel unsatisfied in the morning is because you are trying to make those acts mean something they were never designed to mean. There is a void in your soul that only Jesus can fill. No person on earth can fill that for you.

Or maybe your life feels fine the way it is because you don't ever do anything that bad. But have you ever lusted and wished you could act on it? If you haven't, praise God for that. The only reason you are still standing pure to this day is by the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. Ask him to continue giving you grace.

Perhaps you feel broken over your sin. You feel like there is no hope for a sinner like you. You know what it feels like to desperately want attention and do anything to get it. You know what it feels like to wake up in the morning and feel miserable over your

actions the previous night but you just don't know where to turn. I encourage you, dear sister, that there is a fountain of grace for you at the cross of Jesus Christ. The Bible says that he is living water (John 4:10–11). He is life. He is salvation for those who turn from their sin and trust in his death and resurrection alone (Acts 4:12). Do not despair. There is no sin so great that he is not sufficient to conquer with his finished work (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

The point of purity is not just to make it to marriage without having sex. It's not about getting to marriage and doing whatever you want after you say, "I do." It's about God and obeying him because we love him. You were not made for sexual immorality; you were made for God (1 Cor. 6:13–20). Purity and modesty are lifelong pursuits. All our attempts at purity without the shed blood of Jesus on our behalf are worthless. We need him in our fight to stay pure. I am married, and I still need him daily to fight my sinful tendency toward impurity. All these years later, I still feel that pull from the restaurant—in my flesh I want that bell to ring loudly.

God cares about your heart. He cares about your soul. He cares about what you worship. He wants you to worship him only—not sex, not men, not popularity, not work, not beauty, not fun, not friends, not even church. Purity is important because the Creator of the universe, and of you, is pure. Purity is important because his Son, Jesus Christ, was the purest man who ever lived. And he died to make us pure. He died to cleanse us from our impurity. The sad reality is that even if you have never engaged in any sexual immorality—you are still an impure person in need of Christ's purity. We all are. But the great hope is that we can have Jesus. Do not look to your own attempts at purity. They will fail you every time. Instead, look to Jesus; he is the hope for impure people like you and me.

Restoration in My Life

Feminism tells us that our bodies are our own to use how we please. But God tells us otherwise. As image bearers, we are to display his

glory to a watching world. We are not our own; we are created beings meant to point to the Creator.

For the Single Woman

Inventory your closet. Based on the biblical standards for purity and the fact that your body is not your own, are there any pieces in your closet that tell a different story than the one you were intended to tell with your body? Do you struggle with wanting the bell to ring for you? If so, this is a two-fold problem. One, you want the attention of many, rather than the one God has for you. Two, you are treating your body as your own to display, rather than a gift given to you by God. Ask God to give you a heart of faithfulness to his standards for beauty and purity and a fresh perspective on your body being his and not your own.

For the Married Woman

It's easy to think that you can take a big sigh of relief regarding purity once you say, "I do." I know I did. But as I got into the daily grind of my marriage, I realized that vigilance regarding purity and holiness was just as important this side of the nuptials. The stakes are high in marriage and out of marriage. Do you take liberties with what you allow into your mind through movies, television shows, magazines, and conversations because you think it doesn't impact you now that you are married? Do you dress immodestly because you or your husband like showing off your body you have worked hard for? Ask God for wisdom and unity for both you and your husband as you seek to honor the Lord and his standards for your body.

Study Questions

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the words *modesty* and *purity*? Do you have a negative or a positive reaction to the words? How does your reaction compare to the definitions in this chapter

of purity and modesty? (*Purity*: a lifestyle of a person who has been bought by Christ's blood and who loves her holy God. *Modesty*: a daily declaration that this world is not what God intended, by covering what God saw fit to cover in the garden.)

2. How do you see the culture impacting your own understanding of beauty and purity?

3. If you feel comfortable, share some of your practical application points from the "Restoration in My Life" section.

My name is Courtney. I'm an accidental feminist.

Although many Christians wouldn't identify themselves as feminists, the reality is that the feminist movement has influenced us all in profound ways. We unconsciously reflect our culture's ideas related to womanhood rather than what's found in the Bible.

In this book, Courtney Reissig—a wife, mom, and successful writer—recounts her journey out of “accidental feminism,” offering wise counsel for Christian women related to relationships, body image, and more—drawing from the Bible rather than culture. Whether you're a committed feminist, a staunch traditionalist, or somewhere in between, this book will help you answer the question, “What does it mean to be a Christian woman?” You'll discover the joy, purpose, and importance that are found in God's good design.

“Reissig is wise, discerning, brave, and thoughtful. This book is a needed antidote to the false views of women we so often encounter, and too often absorb, in our culture.”

Russell D. Moore, *President, The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission; author, Tempted and Tried*

“*The Accidental Feminist* reminds me of a handbook on womanhood, though not a rule book. A perfect read for anyone desiring to gain an understanding of womanhood in the Bible.”

Trillia Newbell, *author, United: Captured by God's Vision for Diversity and Fear and Faith*

“Over the past few decades, we've unwittingly absorbed popular ideas about womanhood. If you're a young woman, you would do well to read this book and consider whether you, too, have become an accidental feminist.”

Mary A. Kassian, *Professor of Women's Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, Girls Gone Wise in a World Gone Wild*

“Thoughtful and authentic, Reissig masterfully uncovers the struggles women have in discovering their identity and purpose. This is a book every woman should read!”

Monica Rose Brennan, *Associate Professor and Director of Women's Ministries, Liberty University*

COURTNEY REISSIG is a wife, mother, and writer. She has written for the Gospel Coalition, *Boundless*, and *Her.meneutics* (the *Christianity Today* blog for women), where she is a regular contributor. She is an assistant editor for the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. She lives in Little Rock, Arkansas.

WOMEN'S ISSUES