



PERSPECTIVE

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TRUE FEMININITY

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TRUE FEMININITY



What do you think about when you think about femininity? If you are like most people, you've probably never tried to define it. In many ways, femininity is something that we largely assume, yet when you really try to put words to it, you come up short. Perhaps you think of pink bows, delicate flowers, long skirts, and soft voices. Maybe you think of modern feminine icons like Taylor Swift, Kate Middleton, Joanna Gaines, or Beyoncé. There are many misconceptions about what it means to be truly feminine today. But what does Scripture say? The Bible presents a far richer picture. True femininity is not about style or stereotypes, but about living out our lives in accord with God's good design.

WHAT IS BIBLICAL FEMININITY?

Biblical femininity describes the posture, demeanor, and character of a godly woman. This is different from **biblical womanhood**, which is more oriented around the roles and state of being of a woman. While womanhood is a very important topic, much has already been written about it in the *Perspective* this year, and I'd encourage you to go back and read previous months' articles.

Godly Christians struggle to come up with definitions of femininity and masculinity. And many of their definitions are both short and entirely different from one another. Aside from roles and

biology, there's a lot of disagreement over what characteristics specifically identify a man as a man and a woman as a woman. I appreciate the words of Sam Allberry who notes that when it comes to defining femininity and masculinity, Christians must guard themselves from three primary pitfalls: not saying what the Bible doesn't say, not exaggerating what the Bible does say, and not saying less than the Bible does say.¹

Ultimately, if we are going to find a definition of femininity that is not based in cultural assumptions or stereotypes, we need to look at Genesis 1–2. At the very beginning, we see that *God created male and female in his image* (Gen. 1:26–28). Man and woman are equal in image and worth, and they both receive the mandate to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and rule. Being female is not “less than”—it's fully image-bearing, yet distinctly expressed. Femininity starts with *identity* in God's image, not in cultural stereotypes.

Second, we see *distinctiveness* in God's design (Gen. 2:18–23). When God created woman as a “helper fit for (man)” (v. 18), this was not an afterthought but a purposeful design. We also see that the woman was formed from man and for man (v. 22–23). The differences between them were intentional, not accidental.

For many in the modern world, accepting the distinctiveness of women can be difficult. If we are not careful, even those in the church can unknowingly succumb to a feminist or even a postmodern mindset. Feminism blurs the lines between men and women. It believes that there are no differences between genders except for their biology, and any differences beyond that are purely sociological. Postmodernism erases the lines altogether. Even complementarians can slip into thinking obedience to roles is enough, without embracing the distinct design God has given. I appreciate the following analogy from Kevin DeYoung. He explains how male and female are nothing like having “two identical basketballs – one you reserve for outdoor use and one you set aside for indoor use ... except that God has decreed that the two basketballs be set apart for different functions.”² The Bible is not against women thriving. Far from it! Rather, the Bible shows us that men and women thrive as they live in accordance with God’s good plan. He created them male and female, and he declared this distinction was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). The differences between men and women are not arbitrary but are rooted in nature as part of God’s distinctive design.

Going back to the beginning of Genesis, we also see *the goodness of the order and harmony in God’s design*. Femininity embraces differences between men and women as good, seeing distinction not as a threat, but as a pathway to flourishing. For women, this means resisting the pull to erase distinctions and instead leaning into God’s wise order. This foundation in Genesis keeps us from defining femininity by cultural assumptions, and instead anchors it in God’s design.

THE POSTURE, APPEARANCE, AND DEAMEANOR OF BIBLICAL FEMININITY

So what are the core distinctives that help us understand biblical femininity? Kevin DeYoung has helpfully characterized these as a feminine *posture*, *appearance*, and *demeanor*. As a woman seeks to live out her life as a biblically feminine woman, she should ask, “Are my posture, appearance, and demeanor in line with what the Bible says a woman should be?”

DeYoung first describes the feminine **posture**. Many people can muddy down conversations on masculinity and femininity with nuances and “what abouts” in the culture. DeYoung explains, “Posture is a flexible thing... I use the word posture because

I’m not talking about an inflexible office but about inclination.”³ He describes how the posture of the woman can be seen in Genesis 2:18: “I will make a helper fit for him.” The woman was created to be a *helper*. DeYoung rightly points out that this doesn’t mean that men should never help women or that God himself can’t be classified as the “helper” of his people many times in Scripture. But what it does mean is that the female is to be marked with a posture of helping. And this is going to look different across different stages and situations. The mother of three, the teenage girl, the woman in the workplace, and the elderly woman in a nursing home are all going to reflect this posture differently, but the posture should still be there. DeYoung states, “I’m simply noting that male leading and female helping is what men and women should be intentional to find and eager to accept.” While many nuances exist, the question that the biblically feminine woman should seek to ask is, “Am I humbly willing to carry out a posture of helping and affirming and submitting to godly leadership?”

Second, DeYoung points out that the biblically feminine woman is to be feminine in **appearance**. In 1 Corinthians 11:14–15, Paul declares, “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.” While these verses in 1 Corinthians can be complicated, Paul is highlighting that “confusing the appearance of our genders is contrary to nature.”⁴ More specifically, in Deuteronomy 22:5, we see, “a woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.” We have to be careful here not to create stereotypes. It’s not wrong for women to have short hair or to wear their brother’s sweatshirt when they are cold, yet there is a sense in which it is appropriate for women to display themselves in a culturally feminine way. This does not mean that all women must wear heels, lipstick, and skorts. But it does mean that women should not try to look like men, and vice versa. Today, drag queens can be seen wearing heavy makeup and provocative dresses, trying to imitate the feminine physique. They lean into these cultural stereotypes. While these are a far cry from what the Bible says true femininity is, there is still something in their appearance that is feminine, and for men to dress in such a way is wrong. DeYoung finishes, “the Bible may not give us every detail we might want on this topic, but it does, at least, affirm an essential truth no longer obvious in our day—it is disgraceful

for a man to appear to be a woman and for a woman to appear to be a man.”⁵

Finally, DeYoung notes the **demeanor** of biblical femininity. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7–8, Paul helps us better understand this demeanor: “but we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.” DeYoung states that here, Paul is describing “his own ministry among the Thessalonians like that of a nursing mother: gentle, affectionate, and sacrificial.”⁶ That’s not to say that a man who is being masculine can’t be marked by gentleness, affection, and sacrifice (Paul is describing himself here). Rather, these demeanors are general marks of femininity. One dad recently told me, “If I’m at church and my baby starts crying, and for some reason I need to step away for a moment, I’m going to look around and try to find a woman to help, because I know that she is going to exhibit these qualities. It’s not that a man couldn’t do it, but that God has wired something in women that makes them uniquely gifted to care for my child.” Many theologians have defined this demeanor as that of *nourishing* because women are marked by an affectionate propensity to promote life.

As we seek to understand biblical femininity, we must see that it cannot be separated from the posture, the appearance, and the demeanor of a woman. And yet in all of this, femininity is not about becoming more feminine—it’s about being more fully the woman God created you to be in Christ.

THE CHARACTER OF BIBLICAL FEMININITY

Finally, let’s consider the character of biblical femininity. While all women are called to live out their femininity, the reality is that the gospel of Christ is going to have a radical impact on the character of the Christian woman seeking to live out her femininity day by day. As such, I’d like to highlight three key characteristics of the biblically feminine woman we see in Scripture.

First, the biblically feminine woman has a heart characterized by faith. Apart from Christ and a heart radically transformed by the gospel, none of us—neither men nor women—are going to be able to carry out the character that God has designed for

us. The biblically feminine woman trusts in the Lord and his sovereignty and not her own. Many women languish at the seemingly unattainable character of the Proverbs 31 woman. Yet, she “laughs at the times to come” (Prov. 31:25), not because she is the Instagram-perfect wife with a side hustle (who also looks great doing it), but because she has faith rooted in God.

In the trials of life, such faith can be tested. Many women in the Bible were marked by their faith in the midst of deeply trying circumstances. Rahab risked her life to help enemy soldiers. Ruth left her homeland after the death of her husband. Esther risked her life to save her people from murder. Hannah wept and prayed through deep longings for children. Anna spent decades waiting in old age and widowhood to see the Messiah. I’d bet, in the moment, these women’s situations didn’t seem laughable. If you struggle to have faith in the Lord in the midst of difficult circumstances, have you first considered the faith of these Biblical women? Perhaps you are struggling today, and the situations of your life don’t feel laughable either. Let the example of these women’s faith encourage you to see that they could never have done what they did on their own. They looked to God in faith, and with the help of his sanctifying Spirit, you can too.

This kind of faith is deeply practical. It means that when uncertainty about the future comes—whether that’s career transitions, difficult friendships, singleness, childlessness, making decisions for your children’s future, illness, mourning wayward family members, death of a loved one, or simply aging—your heart can be steadied by God’s promises instead of consumed by anxiety. It means that in conversations with friends, you can bring them back to God’s faithfulness rather than joining in panic or despair. Faith frees you to look toward the future with peace, even joy, because you know God holds it (Ps. 16:5), and more than that, you know God’s in it. While we aren’t promised picture-perfect lives, we are promised God himself. We can laugh at the times to come because in faith we know the Lord will be there with us, he will be in control, and in his presence “is fullness of joy” (Ps. 16:11).

Second, the biblically feminine woman clothes herself in fear of the Lord. We see again and again in Scripture that a woman’s adornment is not to be marked by cultural stereotypes or even physical attraction, but rather, it is to be marked by *fear of the Lord*. In 1 Peter 3:1–7, we see that a woman’s

adornment is not to “be external” but rather is marked by hope in God, respect, purity, a gentle and quiet spirit, and *not fearing anything that is frightening*. Proverbs 31:30 says that, “charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.” In a world plagued with fear, anxiety, and obsession with self, the woman who hopes in the Lord and fears him rightly is going to care more about honoring and following him than about her outward appearance.

This doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t care about what we wear. It just means that what we wear isn’t ultimately the most important thing. Still, our fear of the Lord is going to affect how we adorn ourselves. A woman who fears God will dress with modesty—not to draw attention to herself, but to honor the Lord and love her brothers in Christ. Modesty is ultimately a heart issue, and yet it will also affect what we wear, how much our looks consume our thoughts, and how much time we put into making much of ourselves instead of making much of God.

But what does this mean for you? The woman who fears the Lord clothes herself in both modesty (1 Tim. 2:9) and self-control (Tit. 2:5). When thinking about modesty, for some, it may mean asking if wearing certain articles of clothing is honoring to God and respectful to the men around us. If you aren’t sure, ask a trusted sister in Christ, and then, really listen. When thinking about self-control, examine your own heart and ask if time spent on your appearance (i.e., clothing, hair, exercise, scrolling through influencers on Instagram, etc.) is excessive or honoring to the Lord. Fear the Lord, not man, for in him is “imperishable beauty” (1 Pet. 3:4).

Third, the biblically feminine woman is marked by good works. In 1 Timothy 2:9–10, Paul says that “women should adorn themselves ... with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.” The woman whose heart is characterized by faith and trust in the Lord is going to overflow with good works for him. And what’s interesting is that this call to good works is a call for all women. Whether married (Prov. 31:27), mothers (Tit. 2:4–5; 2 Tim. 1:5), single (1 Cor. 7:32–40), or widowed (1 Tim. 5:3–16), the Bible specifically calls all women in all stages of life to work for the Lord where they are called. When was the last time you asked, “What would it look like for me to abound in godliness and good works right where God has placed me?” In practice, this might look like perseverance in a job,

diligence in caring for a household, generosity with your resources, hospitality toward others, discipling other women, stepping out in evangelism, agreeing to that position at church that really doesn’t sound that fun to you, reaching out to a friend you know needs encouragement, taking someone a meal, or boldly continuing in prayer. The biblically feminine woman asks, “How can I use my gifts to help, build up, and promote love of God and neighbor?”

Finally, for the men reading, remember that you have an important role to play in cultivating and honoring biblical femininity within the church. The Bible says that “a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Prov. 31:30). As you see women around you displaying godly character, tell them! Don’t take for granted the humble faith and steadfast good works of your sisters in Christ. Speak words of gratitude when you see them reflect God’s design. Resist the world’s temptation to value women for outward appearance or cultural stereotypes. The world is constantly telling women to focus their time, attention, and hearts on themselves and their outward identity. So, when you see women focusing on Christ and faithfully spending themselves in obedience to Scripture, use your words and encourage them in the good work that they are doing. I can’t think of a single woman who wouldn’t treasure such a commendation. In doing so, you help create a church culture where biblical femininity is not mocked, minimized, or overlooked, but celebrated as a vital display of God’s glory.

OUR ULTIMATE GOAL

True femininity is not about measuring up to cultural stereotypes, nor is it about erasing the good distinctions God has built into creation. It is about being the kind of woman who reflects God’s design—marked by faith, clothed with fear of the Lord, and adorned with good works. At the end of the day, the call to biblical femininity is not a call to become “more feminine” by worldly standards, but to become more like Christ as women, uniquely displaying his glory in the posture, demeanor, and character he has given us. One day, all the struggles, questions, and tensions we feel about living as women in a fallen world will fade, and what will remain is Christ himself. Until then, our call is simple but profound: to live out our femininity in faith, hope, and love, knowing that in him we have everything we need to flourish.

— Caroline McGill

¹ Sam Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 73-76.

² Kevin DeYoung, *Manhood and Womanhood in the Church*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 133.

³ DeYoung, *Manhood and Womanhood in the Church*, 119.

⁴ DeYoung, *Manhood and Womanhood in the Church*, 123.

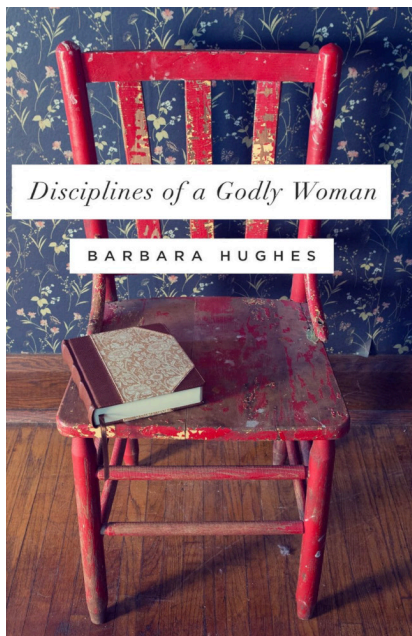
⁵ DeYoung, *Manhood and Womanhood in the Church*, 124.

⁶ DeYoung, *Manhood and Womanhood in the Church*, 125.

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

DISCIPLINES OF A GODLY WOMAN

Written by Barbara Hughes | Recommended by Lisa Timmons



Disciplines of a Godly Woman is an inspiring book. Barbara Hughes, the wife of a pastor, loves the Lord and she loves evangelism. She admonishes us, “Never lose the wonder of the gospel! Never imagine that you have outgrown it.” While reading, it seemed as if we were chatting over coffee as she laid out the disciplines that God uses to train us for godliness.

As members of Mount Vernon, we hear the gospel preached and prayed every Sunday morning in the worship service. But, as the author notes, there is lots of confusion about the gospel among Christians. (More recently, Greg Gilbert even wrote a book with the title, “What is the gospel?” to help Christians clearly share their faith). Hughes tells how she came to conclude that 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 is the foundational text for the gospel. This is important as she argues that the gospel informs every aspect of a woman’s life and gives meaning to whatever a woman does.

The book covers 17 disciplines of a godly woman, including the disciplines of submission, nurturing, and good deeds, which were particularly convicting and helpful for me. Hughes draws on Scripture throughout the book to teach these disciplines.

This book is written for women, both young and old. It paints a beautiful picture of how the gospel brings dignity and value to our humanity and purpose and meaning to our gender differences. But there is also value in men reading it. Both married and unmarried men could find ways to encourage the women and girls in their lives.

If you’re like me and your ambitions are either turned inward or lacking altogether more often than you’d like, this approachable and gospel-saturated book will encourage you to live a big life that prizes God’s glory most of all!

BOOK EXCERPTS

So you see, the Gospel is not just one more thing you schedule into your day planner or kitchen calendar. The gospel shapes everything about you. The discipline of the gospel is coming to God on His terms. That is what this book is all about. As women who understand and embrace the Gospel, we find God’s word so dynamic that it at once defines us, satisfies us, and motivates us.

– “Discipline of the Gospel: The Source of Godliness” p. 25

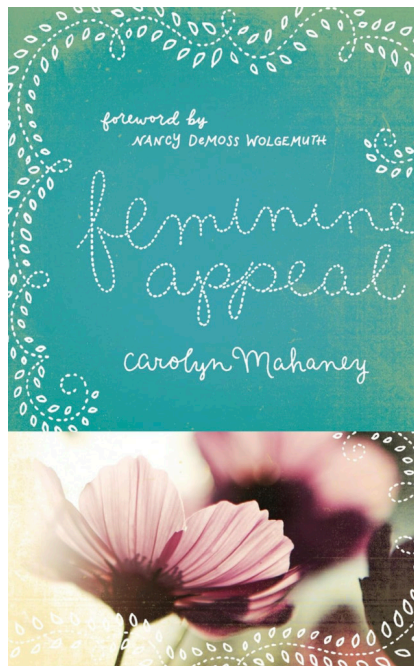
The Word of God addresses what women wear precisely because it values girls. Celebrating gender differences highlights a woman’s value. Modesty is intrinsically elevating: “I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God” (1 Timothy 2:9-10). We’ve already noted that propriety means characterized by appropriateness. If you attend a formal occasion, such as a wedding, you dress up. Your attire shows proper respect for the bride and groom. So dressing down on that occasion would not be worthy of the Gospel.

– “Discipline of Propriety: Submission’s Behavior” p. 92

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

FEMININE APPEAL

Written by Carolyn Mahaney | Recommended by Madison Strickland



Carolyn Mahaney's book *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother* unpacks Titus 2 virtues for women, helpfully illustrating what biblical womanhood looks like. Mahaney likens the beauty of the gospel to a beautiful jewel. The idea of "feminine appeal" is that of the way women with godly character, like a golden crown, adorn the gospel jewel within it. The metaphor of a crown is a helpful one in understanding how women adorn the gospel. A tiara's metalwork is not its defining feature. Rather, the frame of the crown serves to emphasize the beauty of the diamonds set within it. So it is with godly womanhood. We are to display the beauty of the gospel uniquely with a distinctly feminine appeal.

This book considers seven virtues for women from Titus 2:3-5: love of husband, love of children, self-control, purity, working at home, kindness, and submission. Each chapter contains exhortation and encouragement, an emphasis on the gospel and spirit-empowered living, and practical examples of how to implement each virtue. I found myself often convicted while reading, asking, "How can I bring honor to the gospel? Is my love for my family marked by humility, patience, and tenderness?" Mahaney helpfully considers how each virtue impacts daily living. Being self-controlled not only affects how we fight sin, but also how we eat, sleep, think, and feel. Our kindness and goodness should influence how we pray, greet others, listen, encourage, and plan.

While this is a book primarily aimed at wives and mothers, biblical womanhood is for every woman, from high schoolers to grandmothers. If you are a woman who might one day be married or who desires to have children, it is appropriate to read books like this one to prepare your heart. Even if you do not marry or have children, you are a part of a church family. This book may be an aid to you in considering how you might exhort or encourage a sister struggling to love her husband or thinking of her children as a burden. These sisters need you to speak gospel truth to them. And the virtues of self-control, purity, homemaking, kindness, and submission are for every woman. This book will greatly encourage you to steward your heart, home, and relationships with self-control, purity, hospitality, kindness, and love, empowered by gospel hope.

BOOK EXCERPTS

Consider the loveliness of a woman who passionately adores her husband, who tenderly cherishes her children, who creates a warm and peaceful home, who exemplifies purity, self-control, and kindness in her character, and who gladly submits to her husband's leadership...I dare say there are few things that display the gospel jewel with greater elegance. This is feminine appeal.

– "Transformed By Titus 2" p. 28-29

God has graced each of us with unique gifts that he intends for us to use to support our husbands. We are to contribute our ideas and suggestions, offer wisdom and insight, pray and encourage, as well as correct. When we carry out these acts of service in all humility, we help our husbands to lead and fulfill our biblical duty to submit.

– "The Beauty of Submission" p. 142

BIBLE READING PLAN

OCTOBER

TAKE UP & READ

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message.
Take Up & Read!

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| October 1 | Luke 15 |
| October 2 | 1 Timothy 1:12-17 |
| October 3 | Hosea 6:1-5 |
| October 4 | Isaiah 55 |
| October 5 | Matthew 9:9-13 |
| October 6 | Proverbs 6:20-7:27 |
| October 7 | Genesis 39:6-20 |
| October 8 | 2 Samuel 11 |
| October 9 | 2 Samuel 12 |
| October 10 | 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 |
| October 11 | 1 Corinthians 1 |
| October 12 | Proverbs 6:20-7:27 |
| October 13 | 2 Timothy 2:1-7 |
| October 14 | Ephesians 6:10-20 |
| October 15 | Hebrews 12:1-11 |
| October 16 | 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 |

| | |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| October 17 | Judges 2:1-10 |
| October 18 | Philippians 3 |
| October 19 | 2 Timothy 2:1-7 |
| October 20 | Matthew 9:14-17 |
| October 21 | Jeremiah 31:31-34 |
| October 22 | Hebrews 8:1-13 |
| October 23 | Mark 2:18-22 |
| October 24 | Isaiah 54:1-8 |
| October 25 | Romans 7:1-6 |
| October 26 | Matthew 9:14-17 |
| October 27 | Proverbs 8-9 |
| October 28 | Deuteronomy 30:11-20 |
| October 29 | Matthew 7:24-29 |
| October 30 | Matthew 25:1-13 |
| October 31 | 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 |

*Sermons in Bold

NEW MEMBERS



MATT COX



MARISA COX



CLAY VEDDER



ABIGAIL VEDDER

"We must grasp once again, the idea of church membership as being the membership of the body of Christ and as the biggest honour which can come a man's way in this world."

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES



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