

10 THINGS

for teen girls



You are beautiful. You are valuable. You are enough.

KATE CONNER

10



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Nashville, Tennessee

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 18 17 16 15 14

*To all of the dear, beautiful, interesting, incredible teenage girls I've had
the privilege to know. I love you. You are enough.*

And for Madeline, my sparkle. I love you every single second.

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My friends and family, whose names could fill another book. I am humbled by your friendship. You support, encourage, babysit, laugh, weep, and carry. You are my people. Without you there would be no book.

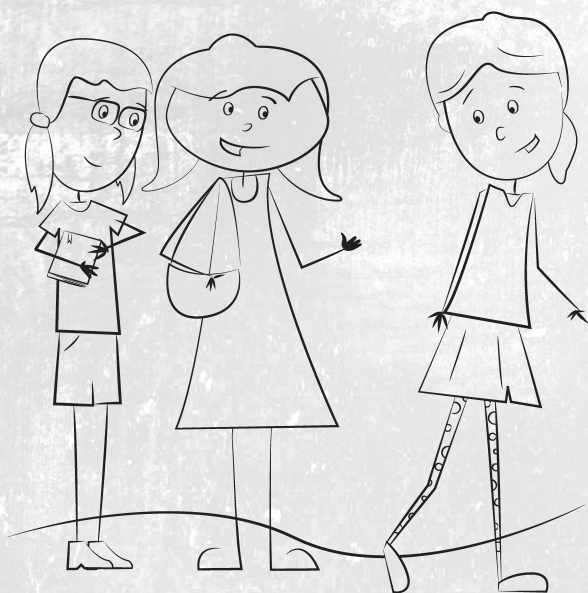
Jesus, You make me enough. Apart from You I have no good thing. All of this and all of me is from You, and through You, and to You.

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CHAPTER

1



NEON PURPLE LEGGINGS

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"Style is a way to say who you are without having to speak." -Rachel Zoe

"Some people think luxury is the opposite of poverty. It is not. It is the opposite of vulgarity." -Coco Chanel

Listen, I know: when adults start to talk about “modesty” you get bored—immediately. It’s not your fault. There is an involuntary biochemical reaction bred directly into your brain. It doesn’t matter how much you love said adults, or how hard you try to be respectful; it doesn’t even matter if you’re a super-modest girl—before you even know what’s happening, your eyes glaze over and your brain is all, “Here we go again,” because you’ve heard it all before.

I know because it still happens to me. Modesty is a buzzword; I react when I hear it. Usually:

- My eyes glaze over. (And, since it is generally frowned upon for adults to roll their eyes, I open mine really wide to force-quit my eye-roll mechanism. So just know that if I’m ever looking at you with my eyes bugged out like a fruit fly, it’s because I’m trying not to roll my eyes at you.)
- I tune out. Daydream. See how long I can hold my breath without anybody noticing, etc.
- I picture white Fruit of the Loom T-shirts under tank tops, the “fingertip” shorts rule, dresses with sleeves—and shoulder pads, bathing suits with skirts attached, and mom jeans.

Another buzzword is “midriff.” What is a midriff anyway? Is it different from a stomach? I don’t completely understand why it needs its own



word—unless it's to give us clues as to who is speaking. Greater than sixty years old = midriff. Less than sixty years old = stomach.

Talking about modesty feels like a minefield sometimes. There are so many buzzwords that have been twisted and bent and shoved into things they don't really mean. Modesty conversations are like that party game, Taboo—the one in which you have to describe an apple without using the words “computer,” “iPod,” “fruit,” “red,” “Mac,” “pie,” or “Snow White.” If you say “modesty,” “midriff,” “suggestive,” “cleavage,” “unladylike,” or “the fingertip-rule,” everyone stops listening: you're out.

But *modesty* is not a dirty Christian word. It's not oppressive or archaic, and I bet you aren't nearly as opposed to the concept of modesty as you are to the word itself.

Sometimes, in the name of real communication, you have to begin by wading through all of the assumptions and preconceived notions,

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debunking and disarming as you go, before you can start talking about the stuff that matters.

The way we dress is one such opinion-laden, assumption-laden issue.

There are three realities that you need to understand before I will grab you by the proverbial (or literal) shoulders and shake some sense into you about the shorts crawling up your hindquarters and the fact that you HAVE TO WEAR BRAS.

1. Women's bodies are beautiful. (Thank God, glory, hallelujah, amen.)
2. Men like to look at women.
3. That's not bad.

THREE REALITIES

Women's bodies are beautiful.

Boys like breasts. As it turns out, they also like other various girl body parts including, but not limited to: stomachs, lips, hair, necks, thighs, calves, feet, hips, backs, shoulders, elbows, ear lobes, and pinky toes.

Boys aren't weird or obsessive, they're just smart. Girls' bodies are beautiful. One of the great perks of womanhood is that we get to be curvy and soft and inviting. Guys are angular, muscular. And while that's nice enough, they're also hairy.

Femininity is a superpower.

Biologically speaking, adolescence is the time when your superpower emerges. Inconveniently enough, adolescence also places you, a newly-christened superhero of a girl, smack in the middle of the wondrous teenage phase of self-discovery. That's not kitsch—it really is wondrous.

My teenage experience was completely, totally, over-the-moon magical. When I was fifteen I learned that I was good at writing. When I was sixteen I learned that I liked it. When I was thirteen I traveled to France. I studied the language for eight more years and returned after my college graduation, because the language and culture never left me. I rocked high school, with only a handful of hiccups here and there. (Like the time a boy asked me to the homecoming dance and I didn't want to say "no," so I pretended I didn't hear him and just kept walking onto the bus. That was lame. And mean.) I discovered my sense of humor (funny: hyperbole, puns, wit. Not funny: any joke involving a bodily function). I learned what kind of music I liked; I discovered my spiritual gifts; I overcame chronic, compulsive shyness; I spoke out about my faith; I fell in *actual* love (not with the homecoming/bus boy, obviously).

Femininity is a
SUPERPOWER.

This kind of self-discovery and self-expression is intoxicating—addicting! It made me crave more experiences: more concerts, more travel, more movie nights, more cookouts, more surprise parties. More days on the lake, more time with my friends, more hobbies, more road trips. I wanted more and more freedom, not to rebel, but to experience. Self-discovery is deliriously freeing.

Too often, we think modesty is about hiding, which makes sense when all you seem to hear is,

"Cover that up."

"No one wants to see that."

"People will get the wrong idea about you."

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“That looks trashy.”

“You will not leave this house wearing *that*.”

The first thing that you need to understand about modesty is that it's not about hiding or conformity or oppressing women. Hips and breasts are not shameful body parts to be covered up or embarrassed about. Hips and breasts (no matter how big or small) are secret weapons of awesomeness, and it's okay to love them.

Men like to look at women.

Men like to look at women. Even married men. Even *happily* married men. Even good, kind, respectful, stand-up men. Even Christian men. Men are hardwired to enjoy women.

Says who?

Says God. Says the history of mankind, the animal kingdom, natural selection, the Bible, your pastor, and every teenage boy you'll ever meet. The fact that men are hardwired to enjoy women is a fact that pretty much everyone can agree on.

Women are beautiful and men like to look at them. The sooner you accept this, the sooner you'll stop using ridiculous non sequiturs like, “It's not my *fault* I have breasts” to justify buying a prom dress WITHOUT A TORSO. (You're right, it's not your fault you have breasts, but some pieces of clothing shouldn't come in two pieces, and prom dresses are one of them. Are you going tanning at prom? Swimming? Jazzercising?)

A man's desire to look at your body does not make him disrespectful; it makes him a man. It is just as unfair to say “Every man who gazes at women is a creep,” as it is to say “Every woman who has big breasts is easy,” or “Every girl who wears makeup is vain.” It is categorically untrue.

Too often when adults talk about modesty, they make it about going on the defense—about protecting yourself from predators. If you're smart, it won't take you long to see the absurdity of this. A bright girl knows that a man who intends to stare will stare, regardless of what she is wearing. In the same vein, men who have committed *not* to stare, won't.

The notion that a woman can dress in a way that will prevent men from looking at her just doesn't hold water, not in the real world. Baggy sweatpants are not even a deterrent. This line of reasoning leads to oppressive legalism: "Maybe if I just cover up a little more . . ."

It also leads to spandex miniskirts; "If he's going to look anyway, then I might as well wear this."

Women's bodies are beautiful; modesty is not about hiding.

Guys like to look at girls; modesty is not about making yourself immune to stares.

It's not bad.

The fact that guys are biologically hardwired to enjoy girls' bodies is not bad. It's not primitive or dangerous. A man enjoying a woman's body is not perverted, gross, immature, or offensive.

When you get the idea in your head that guys are pigs because they like girls' bodies, everything gets messed up. That kind of thinking makes hyper-feminists hate men, belittle and emasculate them. It makes hyper-conservatives oppress women—insisting they cover up every single body part that might interest a man, creating shame and frustration, even blaming women for their own harassment. On both ends of the very wide spectrum, when women discuss among themselves how gross men are, everybody loses.

A man looking at your body and enjoying it is good. You *want* a man to look at your body and enjoy it.

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If you think you don't, it's because you are only considering half of the equation. You think you don't want guys to stare at you, but that's not true. You just don't want the *wrong* guy to stare at you.

When the right man looks at you (to be clear, the right man is the man you marry), you walk a little taller, feel a little more beautiful. When my husband compliments my appearance, I feel secure in my relationship—secure in myself. A little piece of my soul lights up. “I am beautiful! I am enough!” I don't feel uncomfortable because I'm in control. The day I married him I gave him the privilege of enjoying my superpower. He's here by invitation, and as such, his appreciation of me is welcome—and fun.

Modesty is not about making yourself homely or unattractive. Modesty and fashion are not mutually exclusive; neither are modest and beautiful.

Modesty is not about women having to compensate for the poor behavior of men. It is impossible to make yourself immune to leering, and it's not your job, anyway.

Modesty is not about feeling ashamed of breasts, hips, thighs, or any other beautiful, good, superpower body part.

Modesty is not the quenching of self-expression, the endorsement of conformity, or the oppression of femininity.

It's not hard to see why you might buck wildly at modesty when these are the things that come to mind at the mention of the word. No girl in her right mind would say, “Body issues, frustration, shame, ill-fitting clothes, and unattractiveness? Sign me up today!”

But if those are the things that modesty is not, then what *is* it?

NEON PURPLE LEGGINGS

The way we look matters.

It's warmer and fuzzier to say, "It's what's on the inside that counts," and while that is absolutely true, it's not the whole story. The inside matters when you have to stand before God and answer for your life. The inside matters when you're determining your value and worth. The inside matters when you're looking for lasting beauty.

But the outside matters when
you're looking for a job.

There isn't one of us who doesn't judge people by their appearances all the time. You'll notice as you walk down the street that there are no cartoon caption bubbles hovering over people's heads that say things like, "I

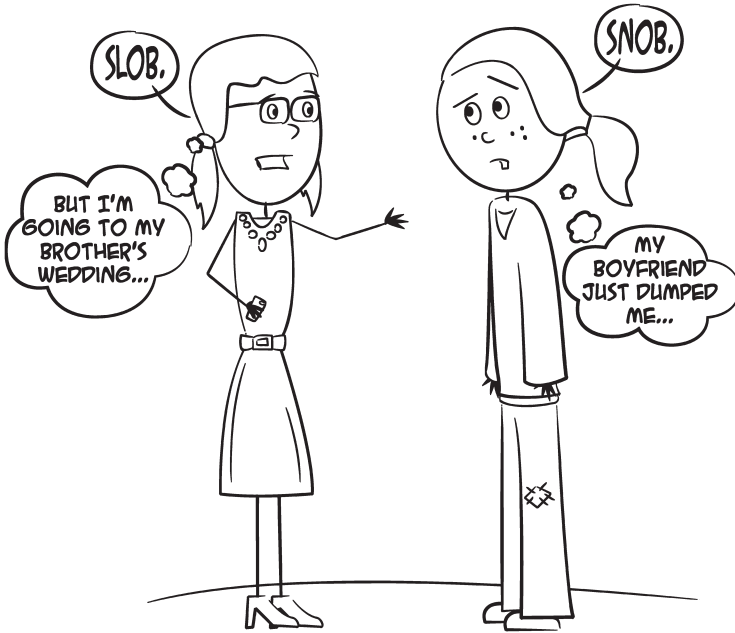
am wearing grease-stained yoga pants and my hair is matted in three or four places because I have four-month-old triplets, and I have not slept in four days," or "It's not that I don't believe in soap, it's just that I changed my own tire on the side of the road LIKE A BOSS. Please excuse the dirty fingernails."

(I'm glad that there is no caption bubble hovering over my head because 98 percent of the time it would say, "I have no excuse," or "Have totally let myself go.")

We don't get CliffsNotes on people; and we don't have time to get to know every person we interact with. You can blame the constraints of time and physics for that. When people make assumptions based strictly on physical appearance, it's not because they are shallow—it's because that is the only information they have to go on. These assumptions aren't

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character judgments (at least they shouldn't be) but inferences about a person's interests and style.

This makes the clothes you wear a walking advertisement for yourself. They are the closest thing you have to CliffsNotes or a floating cartoon caption bubble.

Clothing speaks; it can say all sorts of things. It can say:

1. My grandmother dressed me for Sunday school today.
2. I spent too much money on this purse.
3. I just came from working out, so I probably have my life together.
4. I have a high-paying, white-collar job, as evidenced by my shiny shoes and power tie. Envy me!

5. Check my tattered flannel shirt! I wish they'd bring back Grunge.

6. Hey, look at my breasts! Look at my breasts!

7. I only listen to bands that nobody has ever heard of.

8. I am obviously colorblind.

9. I like animal prints more than average people do!

10. I didn't feel like doing laundry this month.

Beneath all the pretense and protest and party lines of "I only dress for me," the truth is that people dress to identify with other people. Most of the time, the clothes you choose are either a reflection of who you are or who you want to be. That's why preps dress like preps, hipsters dress like hipsters, indie-boho-free-spirits dress like indie-boho-free-spirits, and so on.

Because clothing speaks, every person who dares venture outside of his or her own living room must ask themselves, "Is mine telling the truth?"

It is your responsibility to create an accurate image for yourself, not the responsibility of the masses to interpret you correctly using their psychic powers.

The great thing about clothing speaking is that it can satisfy every drop of your need for self-expression; you can make your clothing say anything you want. I've manipulated my clothing to say all sorts of things.

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correctly using their
PSYCHIC POWERS.

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A few years ago I went shopping in New York City. I must have gotten caught up in the giant posters of fashion-forward women in neon clothing and giant, blown-out hair. In hindsight, the techno music was probably a contributing factor because I came home with a pair of neon purple leggings.

I am a stay-at-home mom. My husband is a pastor. IF I leave the house (a big “if”), it is to go to church with lots of little old ladies. I don’t know what I thought I was going to do with neon purple leggings, but they seemed very important at the time. I owned those neon purple leggings for an entire year and never wore them once. I would see them lying there in my sock drawer; I would touch them fondly, my fashion-forward neon purple leggings, then close the drawer and pull on my jeans.

The following year, we moved to Alabama—not exactly fashion-forward neon purple leggings territory. On the very first Sunday we were there, I touched my fashion-forward neon purple leggings thoughtfully. It was first impression time, and in a moment of extraordinary courage I decided, “For all these people know, I am the hippest of young mothers, and I come from a place where people wear neon purple leggings all the time.” Then I said, “Let there be style!” and I marched into church in my neon purple leggings where people seriously regretted having hired us to come there.

No, but they did say, “You are so stylish, I could never pull that off.”

I used my clothing to make a statement about myself. And now, I can wear anything I please and nobody is ever surprised, because in their minds

modesty is about
choosing clothes
that intentionally
communicate what you
want the world to
know about you.

I will always be “the kind of girl who can wear neon purple leggings.”

Modesty is about dressing on purpose. It is about being mature enough to reckon with some realities: the reality that men like to look at women; the reality that if you display

your breasts overtly, men will stare, no matter how great the guys are; and the reality that clothing speaks, and that the way you look matters.

Modesty is about choosing clothes that intentionally communicate what you want the world to know about you; it is an integral part of creating your own, truthful image.

BASIC MARKETING

I mentioned how mutually positive and delightful it is when a husband can enjoy his wife visually. It's totally flattering. When the right man looks at your body, you feel affirmed.

Wrong is the polar opposite of right, so it stands to reason that when the *wrong* man looks at your body, you feel the polar opposite of affirmed; you feel degraded.

When the right man enjoys your feminine superpower, he is there by invitation. You are in control and every action, right down to each stolen glance, is based upon mutual trust and respect. You are a whole person that is loved.

When the wrong man enjoys your body, it is a violation. When a man on the street leers, cat-calls, smirks while nodding his head, whispers to his buddies, or makes a crude gesture, it is reprehensible; he is not invited. His staring makes you feel as naked as he is imagining you to be, and the mixture of anger, embarrassment, and disgust twists and burns in your stomach. And please don't buy this nonsense about men admiring God's creation. I know how it feels to be noticed by men, and I know how it feels to be objectified. There is a discernable difference in both the behavior and in the way it makes me feel. I have to believe that we all know the difference. I refuse to shame the noticing, and, just as vehemently, I refuse to tolerate the objectifying.

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Modesty is about taking control. Dressing modestly is a way of telling every man in the world, “I have not given you permission to stare at my breasts. That privilege belongs to a man who knows me—my personality, my handwriting, my family, my stories—my whole self. I am not a Playboy bunny; I do not exist for the entertainment of men. I am more than that, so you don’t get to use me that way, even in passing.”

Dressing modestly is about harnessing your superpower.

Let me be clear, women who dress provocatively do not deserve to be disrespected, degraded, or violated in any way. Ever. A woman in the buff is still not “asking for it.” But if a woman dresses provocatively and does not *relish* the attention her body garners from men, she is not telling the truth with her clothing. There is a breakdown in communication, a disconnect.

This is basic marketing—PR, reputation management. We are all our own agents, and you must represent yourself well. If you don’t mind being viewed as a sex object without thoughts, feelings, or skills outside of the bedroom, then by all means, dress to call attention to your sex organs. I can’t fault that logic; it is at least consistent. But if you want to be known for your great ideas or your cross-country running accomplishments, you have to put those things in the display case.

If you want to be known for your humor, your kindness, your eyes, your thoughts on social issues, your athleticism, or your confidence, you must put those things on display more prominently than your breasts.

While there is no body part you can accentuate with a good belt to communicate kindness, you can ensure that a man isn’t allowed to enjoy your breasts until he’s gotten to know *all about* your kindness, among other things.

Listen, your body is beautiful, but you are more than a body. It would be such a shame if you made it so easy for people to ignore the rest of you.

Modesty allows people to see the rest of you—to see the best of you.

MODESTY ALLOWS PEOPLE
TO SEE THE REST OF
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OF YOU.

ON ATTRACTING MEN

I work with teenage girls every single day. I don't have enough fingers and toes to count how many times one of you has come to me, baffled and disillusioned, plopped down on my couch and said with a huff, "*I only attract jerks.*"¹

My response is always the same: "Every woman attracts a handful of creeps in her lifetime. You're not broken; it just means you're a beautiful girl. But (sorry, there is a "but") if you are *only* attracting creeps, there might be something to discuss."

Then I drop the bomb.

"If the guys who want to date you:

- leave as soon as they get what they want
- don't make any effort to get to know what you're thinking and feeling
- constantly try to put their hands on your body
- seem too interested in the bodies of other girls²

1. "Jerks can be substituted with "creeps," or "idiots," and other more colorful terms.

2. Use this list as a litmus test; if these four behaviors describe the boy you're dating, get out. At best, he's incredibly immature and not ready for a relationship. More likely, he has an unhealthy view of girls, which will cause you to be objectified, disrespected, and hurt.

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If you notice a long line of losers, you have to ask yourself, *What am I doing that is causing these creeps to flock?*"

This is almost always met with stunned silence as the teenager tries to decide whether or not I've offended her. I forge ahead quickly before I get the involuntary eye-roll and she's gone forever.

"The truth is that, by and large, you'll attract what you bait. Are you carrying yourself to bait godly young men? Or boys that just want you for your body?"

LOOKS OF HORROR. This is the point in the conversation at which the girls start tugging at their tank tops to cover up their cleavage.

We are getting back to the very basics of math here—back to common sense and the most primal laws of attraction.

Guys who value compassion are drawn to compassionate girls. Guys who value intelligence are drawn to intelligent girls. Guys who value style are drawn to stylish girls. Guys who value bacon are drawn to girls who cook bacon. THERE IS A PATTERN HERE.

If you want to date a godly man—a man who wants to marry a godly woman—then you should endeavor to be the godly woman he is seeking.

If your figure outshines your positivity and personality as the most prominent thing about you, then you are baiting the kind of boy whose primary interest is what is under your shirt and how easily he can access it.

Ask yourself who you're baiting, and don't sugarcoat the answer—tell yourself the truth.

The other issue at hand is that when you display your body without much reservation, you are shutting down all the male brains in the vicinity. I was so not kidding when I called it a superpower. You can SHUT DOWN MEN'S BRAINS. Studies show that sex (and related matter) turns

off higher brain functions in men; they start thinking with their hormones, if you will. This is precisely why the girls who regularly dress provocatively are the same ones complaining about what mindless brutes men are.

A 2008 Princeton University study,³ originally published in the *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, revealed that when men viewed images of bikini-clad women, the part of their brains associated with tools and the intention to commit action lit up. There was also a remarkable inactivity in the part of the brain that processes another person's thoughts and feelings. No human interaction and a desire to use and act upon; this is the very definition of objectification. It turns you into an object. A supplementary study revealed that men associated images of women in bikinis with first-person verbs like "I handle. I push. I grab." The same men associated pictures of women dressed in casual business attire with third-person verbs: "She handles. She pushes. She grabs." In one scenario, the women were out of control (being acted upon), and in the other the women were in control (the ones doing the acting). So don't get too excited about the ability to turn a man's brain off—it's not as flattering as you think.

It is so important to note that these findings aren't bad. They don't indicate that men are flawed or innately disrespectful. They simply reveal information about the (God-created and "very good"⁴) male brain. The takeaway is that if we, as women, want

if We Want to Be
Viewed as Whole
People, We must
Present ourselves as
Whole People.

3. See <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/jocn.2010.21497>.

4. God's words, not mine.

a sexily-dressed woman on a deeper level, we should dress in a way that allows us to be taken seriously.

Here's one reason this matters: If you want a meaningful relationship—if you want a guy to value qualities in you besides your cup size (spoiler alert: you do)—you're going to need his higher brain function intact. In other words, put on some more clothes so that you can engage the opposite sex on a higher brain wave. Everybody wins.

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER: THE HEART

I fear that up until this point, I may have oversimplified the matter. Everything I've written is practical, tried, and true, but it's also operating on a dangerous assumption.

It is operating on the assumption that smart, bright young women do not wish to be thought of as sex objects. But the sticky thing is, some do. Some of you have been seduced by the power of it. You relish the ability to turn a man's brain to mush. You delight in wielding your superpower over the first boy who comes close enough to be manipulated—you're flattered by the knowledge that you can flash a little skin and get anything you want. No amount of science or common sense can talk you out of immodesty if immodesty is your goal.

This is a sin-sick heart problem, and it cannot be remedied by logic.

When C. S. Lewis reflected on our sin-sick heart problems, he wrote, "It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. . . . We are far too easily pleased."

This is simply, exactly, correct. The part of your heart that seeks to be found beautiful has been twisted and perverted into a desperate desire

for attention. It's not that you desire attention too much; it is that you don't desire what is greater: respect.

All attention is not equal. It is possible to get a man's attention and *never* have his respect.

You can't revel in the attention your breasts elicit from men, and then be offended that your breasts are all they're interested in. You wanted attention, and you got it.

You can't delight in men's drooling, be flattered by their stammering, manipulate them with your miniskirt, and then be surprised when your body is the only thing they care about. You wanted attention, and you got it.

You should never settle for the ability to make a man drool when you could have his admiration.

Sweet sisters, all attention is not equal. You think you want attention, but you don't. You want respect.

all attention is not equal..
you think you want
attention, but you don't.
you want respect.

Use modesty as a tool to pursue that which is greater: admiration, respect, and love.



THINK IT THROUGH, TALK IT OUT

1. What comes to mind when you think about modesty?
2. Modest really just means “not drawing attention to yourself.” It has absolutely nothing to do with sex or lust or provocation. (Revealing clothes are just a surefire way to draw attention to yourself, which is why people spend so much time talking about them.) Why do you think God tells people (guys and girls) to dress modestly?
3. If you had a floating CliffsNotes bubble over your head that summed up your daily life in a sentence or two, what would it say?
4. Who do you dress for? School authorities? A sports team? Parents? Friends? The cool kids? A boy? An employer or interviewer? Do you think it’s okay to dress for other people, or should you only dress for yourself?
5. Think about your favorite outfit and the two or three outfits that you wear the most often: what do those clothes tell the world about you?

6. If you could have your appearance say *anything*, what would you want it to communicate?
7. What are small, doable steps you can take to make that a reality? Are there clothing pieces that you need to invest in? Pieces you need to give away? An attitude shift? How can you change the way you take care of your clothing/appearance?
8. What is the difference between attention and respect?
9. Why do girls settle for attention? Think for a moment: have you settled for attention?
10. What things can you and your friends do to insist on respect?