



Nancy Answers Your Modesty Questions

by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

1. What do you mean when you say a woman should “ask herself the right questions” about clothing?

I’m convinced that some women honestly don’t realize that some of their clothing choices are immodest. Chances are, they’re not even really thinking about whether what they’re wearing is modest. They’re probably doing what most women do—going with the flow . . . mindlessly fitting into the culture.

I encourage women to stop and think about every aspect of their lives—their attitudes, actions, words, and yes, the way they dress—and to be willing to ask themselves tough questions and give honest answers.

Here are some great “heart check” questions suggested by Carolyn Mahaney and her daughter Nicole Whitacre:

- *What statement do my clothes make about my heart?*
- *In choosing what clothes to wear today, whose attention do I desire, and whose approval do I crave? Am I seeking to please God or impress others?*
- *Is what I wear consistent with the biblical values of modesty, self-control, and respectable apparel, or does my dress reveal an inordinate identification and fascination with sinful cultural values?*
- *Who am I trying to identify with through my dress? Is the Word of God my standard or is it the latest fashion?*
- *Have I asked other godly individuals to evaluate my wardrobe?*
- *Does my clothing reveal an allegiance to the gospel, or is there any contradiction between my profession of faith and my practice of godliness?¹*

2. How can I know what is “modest” dress?

The Bible doesn’t give us an itemized list of what is and is not modest dress. It does instruct us to live in a way that honors God and that does not cause our brothers to stumble. If you’re a child of God, the Holy Spirit lives in you, and will help you know what is pleasing to the Lord.

Remember that our goal is not to draw attention to ourselves, but rather to please God and to reflect His glory. Ask Him to help you choose clothing that honors Him and that is appropriate, based on biblical principles such as modesty, moderation, and femininity

Ask a godly family member or a close friend to give you their honest opinion about your clothing choices. Ask yourself, “Why do I want to wear this particular outfit?” and “Do I truly believe God would be pleased with the way I look in this outfit?”

3. Is it possible to have a modest outward appearance and yet not please the Lord?

Definitely! It’s possible to have a modest appearance and yet have a critical, self-righteous, and judgmental attitude. You can be dressed extremely conservatively, while having a rebellious heart.

God considers true beauty to be internal and spiritual. It certainly glorifies God when we honor Him with our outward appearance—but our outward appearance must be a reflection of an inward spirit that is pure and submissive to Him.

4. How can I cultivate a heart of modesty in my daughter?

Start young . . . don’t wait till your daughter’s a pre-teen to address these issues. (If you do, you’re sure to have a battle on your hands!) Don’t dress your little girl in skimpy outfits and then expect her to understand why it’s not O.K. to wear the same kind of outfits when she’s 16!

Don’t start by throwing a list of rules at your daughter; instead give her a model for making godly choices. Help her understand *what* modesty is, and *why* it matters. Put the emphasis on her *heart*, rather than communicating that all you care about is the clothes she wears.

Don’t be afraid to talk openly about these issues. Remember, you’re *the mother!* At times, your daughter may not agree with you and may react to your input. But your job is to train her to be godly. Provide specific, practical instruction about *how* to be modest in dress and behavior.

If possible, encourage your husband to develop a strong relationship with your daughter and to talk with her about the meaning of true beauty and the importance of modesty.

Be consistent. For instance, don’t talk about the importance of modesty while running around the house in immodest shorts or sleepwear, or allowing the family to watch movies with immodest women in them. Set a godly example for your daughter, in both character and appearance.

5. My husband wants me to dress in ways that I feel are immodest. What should I do?

Ask the Lord to help you discern what’s motivating your husband to ask you to dress inappropriately. Are you pleasing him sexually in private? In public, are you dressing in a way that is an embarrassment to him? (Most men would rather have an attractive woman by their side!)

Make sure you are pleasing your husband and fulfilling his desires in every *legitimate* way—include clothing styles, hairstyle, etc. Be creative in trying to select clothes that he likes, but that are not provocative, so he doesn’t feel you’re rejecting his desires. Do what you can to make yourself attractive for him.

If he still wants you to dress immodestly, make a humble appeal. Let him know that you want to please him and that your body is fully available to him, but that you want it to be reserved for *his*

eyes. Explain that you want an exclusive relationship with him and that you don't want to cause other men to have lustful thoughts toward you as a result of the way you dress.

6. What do you think about swimsuits?

Like every other type of clothing, swimsuits need to be evaluated according to a standard of modesty. Ask yourself, does this article of clothing fulfill the purpose for clothing, which is to cover nakedness? Does it expose or emphasize private parts of my body?

Here's something to think about. Did you know that until the mid-1800s men and women swam in different places or at different hours? Yet, today, men and women swim together in swimwear that is often provocative and designed to expose human anatomy. In his thought-provoking book, *Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America*, Jeff Pollard traces the historical development of swimwear in the U.S. and shows how the powerful influence of the fashion industry eventually overruled a sense of modesty in our culture:

*“Christian morality and its attending modesty, which had previously served as resistance to public nudity, simply caved in to growing public pressure. The voice of God’s Word was slowly but surely drowned out by the voice of an increasingly secular media, the fashion industry, and public opinion. Consequently, our culture’s basis for modesty eroded, almost to the vanishing point. Let me put it another way: no one held a gun to America’s head and said, “Strip or die!” The fashion industry simply said, “This is what the fashionable wear”—and our culture eagerly disobeyed.”*²

7. It's easy to say that at times being modest will mean “I won't be as cool” or that “I won't fit in with the crowd.” But this is really hard for me to really do. Help!

This is why we need to go back to the basics. Why do you live? Why do you exist? What's your purpose in life? Years ago, God gave me a desire and commitment to live to glorify Him, to please Him, and to reflect what He is like to a watching world. Knowing my purpose helps me make those tough choices that I know are right, even when it means I have to go against the flow of the culture.

8. Why do you think so many Christian women dress immodestly today?

I believe that a lack of understanding of modesty, along with a desire to look current, has caused many Christian women to fall prey to the enemy's plan. Also, many women and girls compare the way they dress to the way the contemporary culture dresses, and think they're doing O.K.—compared to everyone else, they're really “modest”! The problem is, they're using the wrong standard!

I suspect that the majority of Christian women are oblivious to how they may cause men—even godly men—to stumble in their thought life by the way they dress.

¹Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Mahaney Whitacre, *Girl Talk: Mother-Daughter Conversations on Biblical Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 205.

²Jeff Pollard, *Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America* (San Antonio, TX: The Vision Forum, Inc., 2002), 41-42.