

*Jacob's Well***Lesson Title:** Biblical Principles—Modesty

**Key Concept:** Applications may change, but biblical principles are useful in all times and locations. The principle of modesty is much more complex than we often assume.

**Scriptures:**

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

(1 Corinthians 6:20 *King James Version*)

They should wear decent and appropriate clothing and not draw attention to themselves by the way they fix their hair or by wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes.

(1 Timothy 2:9 *New Living Translation*)

**Context Scriptures:** Proverbs 17:27; 1 Corinthians 11:22; 1 Timothy 6:6; Philippians 4:11; 1 Peter 3:3–4; Matthew 18:6; Romans 14:13

**Lesson Thoughts:**

Modesty. We tend to oversimplify this principle. When we consider it, we think we understand its meaning and that others share our understanding. But a penthouse for a rich person and a mobile home for a poor person can both be considered modest. So, let's unpack the meanings of this "easily understood" word to unearth its hidden complexity. The standard definition of modesty is behavior or appearance that avoids indecency and is middle-of-the-road, not too much. This definition focuses on the non-gaudy, non-haughty, well-behaved, and meager aspects of modesty. We think of apparel and accessories, material possessions, or excess. And while these factors are included in modesty, other less considered aspects are the biblical principles of contentment, a healthy sense of self, temperance, and mindfulness, all in the effort to glorify God.

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Paul tells Timothy that “true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth” (1 Timothy 6:6). In other words, learning to be satisfied in all situations is valuable. Perhaps Paul’s own experience taught him this: “For I have learned to be content in whatever situation I find myself” (Philippians 4:11). This brings us to temperance, or self-control, which is a result of our contentment. If we are satisfied with ourselves, then we will be more balanced in our interactions. “Church leaders must live blamelessly, not be quick-tempered or violent” (Titus 1:7). As modest leaders, which all are called to be, we must be content and temperate because these indicate sound thinking and a grounded perspective.

Being mindful is another trait of modesty. Our awareness of others and how we affect others demonstrates our modest or immodest thinking. The Corinthians were admonished for obliviously eating their lavish communion meals in the face of poor Christians without regard for their feelings or deprivation (1 Corinthians 11:22). Such reckless disregard is certainly indecent and not modest. Being modest is like standing in the middle and looking from a panoramic view. And, when you have a panoramic view, you can see all angles. Modesty leads to consideration for how we are perceived and how we perceive others. “A person with understanding is even-tempered” (Proverbs 17:27).

Perhaps the simplest way to describe and apply the biblical principle of modesty is “in the middle”: not too low, not too high, not too elevated, not too abased—operating from a centered perspective. When we are moderate, we are grounded, peaceful, and considerate, glorifying God in all aspects of our lives.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) When you heard the lesson topic was modesty, what did you assume the focus would be?
- 2) How should the less considered aspects of modesty be applied to the way we adorn ourselves, what we buy, and how we regard one another?
- 3) How can operating from a modest (sound/content) mindset counteract feelings of jealousy, covetousness, and over-ambition?
- 4) Why is trying to deliberately look homely and deprived not modest?

**Next Lesson:** Honest Humility

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- 1) If you do a word search in the Bible for the word “modesty,” you won’t find many verses that contain this exact word. Review the lesson again and consider the expanded definition: contentment, temperance, and mindfulness. Then search the Scriptures for verses that refer to these applications of modesty. There are more than this lesson could include!
- 2) Think about your lifestyle, your behavior, and your value system. Then think about where you come from, not just where you have lived in your lifetime, but what experiences, influences, and culture(s) shaped you. Now take some time in prayer and self-reflection and consider your excesses and deficits. Allow the Word of God to bring you into balance if you find yourself too \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).
- 3) This lesson purposely doesn’t focus on the importance of exterior modesty (clothing, jewelry, make up, hair, false additions, extravagant things, etc.), instead exploring other aspects. But what do these things say about our inner beliefs? What do they say about how we think of ourselves and our values? What could they mean or say to others? Why do you do them, or what do they do for you? How do they affect others? Are your choices in line with the scriptural principles of modesty as opposed to our often “slippery” self-defined understanding? When attempting to determine if you are modest or not, what is your guide or point of reference?

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**Notes and Reflections, cont.**