

# What A Bikini Taught Me About Modesty

## *Beauty And Fashion*

I bought my first bikini when I moved away from home. I grew up wearing tankinis and one-piece suits out of respect for my parents and the culture in which I was raised. When I went to college, the girls who were Christians that I knew didn't share my conviction. They often asked me why I wore my more "modest" suit. When it came time to answer their questions, the only thing I could think was "I do it because my parents taught me to." Eventually this excuse didn't even convince me, and I bought a cute bikini for that summer in the South.

At first, fitting in with the other girls made me feel better about myself. Now I was "normal" — just like everyone else! But as the summer wore on, I questioned my reasons for buying the swimsuit, and eventually I put it away entirely — and not because of my parents or my congregation.

## *What Changed My Mind?*

In my teens and early twenties, I really struggled with confidence. I wanted to be liked and accepted by people, especially other girls. One of the reasons I bought my bikini was to boost my self-confidence. But I quickly realized that wearing a skimpier swimsuit couldn't have a lasting effect on my confidence because it was an external fix to an internal problem. Dressing up a lack of confidence doesn't "fix" the problem — it just covers it for a little while. Instead of helping me become more confident, it made me a spiritually weaker person who depended on my outward appearance for validation and approval.

I also realized that I was advertising my body — something I wanted to have valued and treasured — to the eyes of any passing guy. I had been working with non-Christian guys for many years and I'd heard the comments they made about the girls at car washes and on the beach. I knew that by exposing my body to the public eye, I had devalued something precious, and I began to search the Bible to see what it said about my value as a woman.

As I studied God's word concerning my decision, I came to understand the incredible value God placed on my body. In the Old Testament, God's glory was housed in the richly decorated, golden Temple: "And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:10-11). Now as Christians, His glory (through the Holy Spirit) resides within each of our bodies. We are the new temples of God's glory (1 Corinthians 6:19)! In Genesis, I discovered that woman was God's final touch on Creation. She was the crowning glory of all God made.

I also noticed that it was after Adam and Eve sinned that they were given coverings for their bodies: “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). Modesty — the covering — was given to the man and woman to protect them from the shame of nakedness (cp. Genesis 2:25). God was preserving the beauty of their bodies from a sinful world. Suddenly I realized that my bikini was not advertising my God-given value, but advertising the beauty of my body to a world that would never appreciate it the way God intended.

### ***Modesty Isn't Just About The Guys***

I grew up thinking modesty was just about helping guys in their battle against lust. But modesty isn't about preventing men from lusting after women. While we should desire to help Christian men uphold purity, we have our own responsibility to walk purely. This means that in every decision, we shouldn't be asking, “How does this make me feel?” or “How far can I go?” but “How holy can I be?” (1 Thessalonians 4:7; 1 Peter 1:16; 2 Peter 3:11).

Modesty is humility in action. This is why Christian girls should be the very best at it! We have been given the gracious love of God. Not only that, but God has explicitly outlined just how valuable we are to Him. The fact that Almighty God loves imperfect girls like us is humbling, and our response is to worship God in every area of life, including how we dress. In realizing how much God loved me and how beautifully He designed my body, I realized that I was devaluing His best intentions by wearing my bikini, and I put it away for good.

### ***Recognize Your Value***

I'm a new mom to a little girl. Someday she and I will have this same conversation about modesty, and I will give her the same encouragement: Recognize that you, and your body, have value. Don't let the culture tell you that value comes from taking off more clothes — that's not possible. Value is something with which we are born, and it must be preserved with great love and care. Because I already love my daughter, I hope she makes the same decision to recognize and preserve her value.

In every decision we make, we shouldn't be asking “How far can I go?” or “How much can I get away with?” but “How holy can I be?” I hope you ask that question in every area of life — not just at the pool, beach, or lake. In perfecting holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1), we become more like Jesus (Romans 8:29). He is the One who gave you value and wants you to embrace it to the fullest. By embracing your value (1 Peter 3:3-4), you will reflect the kind of confidence that no swimsuit or “hot body” could ever provide. And more importantly, you will be embracing the love of God, who longs for you to be appreciated for who you are — not just what you look like.

Adapted from Phylicia Masonheimer