

GOD'S
PRIORITIES
FOR TODAY'S
WOMAN

Lisa Hughes



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

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GOD'S PRIORITIES FOR TODAY'S WOMAN

Copyright © 2011 by Lisa Hughes

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hughes, Lisa, 1962-

God's priorities for today's woman / Lisa Hughes.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7369-3060-4 (pbk.)

1. Christian women—Religious life. I. Title.

BV4527.H8445 2011

248.8'43—dc22

2010028730

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Printed in the United States of America

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 / BP-SK/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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God's Unchanging Priorities for You

It happened again. Our family was watching reruns of the TV show *Murder, She Wrote*, which aired on television from 1984 to 1995, when the fabled “generation gap” reared its head and roared, making its presence known in our living room. This time that roaring generation gap was incarnated in the form of our three teenagers hooting at some of the hairstyles and clothes worn by the stars in the TV series. I energetically defended the “big” hair and large shoulder pads in the outfits because I too had aspired to big hair in the 1980s. This only served to make my kids laugh even more. Apparently exclaiming, “Everyone wore their hair like that,” and “That was considered really fashionable at the time” didn’t convince my teenaged jury that those styles were really “cool,” for their own sense of fashion and beauty has been defined by the time in which they live.

Looking back, I do have to admit some of those hairstyles and clothing fashions were funny looking! It reminded me once again of the transitory nature of what we consider “in” or even what we consider beautiful. While it’s always hard to predict what may start a beauty or fashion trend, it’s easy to predict that whatever or whoever starts the trend affects society in a powerful way. No wonder the beauty and fashion industries spend millions of dollars on advertising alone! If they can spark a trend, then a whole generation will be shaped by it—to the point that multitudes of women will happily grace the streets attired in leg warmers, permed hair, and blue eye shadow.

God's Standard for Beauty Does Not Change

Not only does the world's criteria for *external* beauty change, but its standard for what constitutes beautiful character or a fulfilling life changes too. And it changes constantly! What's in one season is out the next. It's a challenge to keep up with it all. As we look around us it's obvious that Satan, the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4), desires to twist and subvert God's plans in any way he can. Through Satan's influence and man's own sinfulness, the world is convinced that what is new or different is always best, and that God's ways are outdated.

The world would have us believe that God's ways cannot exist in today's culture, that they are unnecessary and outlandishly archaic. Yet God's priorities for women are neither outdated nor irrelevant. God's purposes for us were created out of His wisdom and love. They are perfect and are just right for us no matter who we are or what circumstances we face.

And though the world may shift and morph, there is one place we can turn to where the standard remains the same, and that's the Word of God. Our God's unchanging character and purposes are completely preserved within the pages of Scripture. And because God is perfect in everything He does, then what He deems good and right—even beautiful—is the true standard, no matter what comes and goes in our ever-changing world. When we understand God's plan for womanhood, it helps us cultivate proper attitudes about being a woman and how to live out the roles of wife, mother, and homemaker. And one of the best places to study those priorities is in the book of Titus.

God's Priorities Revealed

Within the space of three verses, Titus chapter 2 provides a succinct definition of a woman's role and calling. The passage reveals God's priorities for women and the high standard of godly character *all* women are to embody—at every age and in every life situation. This information is narrowed down to the essentials and allows us to zero in on exactly what God desires for us as women. And that's good news for us because Titus 2:3-5 provides a practical and straightforward look into what God deems important for every woman.

Understanding the Background of the Book of Titus

Have you ever interacted with someone and became somewhat irritated or even appalled by their behavior, only to discover later some extenuating circumstances that explained their strange actions? It's so helpful to know those things! A little bit of background information can make such a difference in how we respond to a person, and *it is no different when we study the Bible*. When we understand the background of the apostle Paul's letter to Titus, we will appreciate all the more the significance of the instructions given to women in chapter 2.

The Conditions at Crete

In this letter the apostle Paul counsels his friend and co-worker in the faith, Titus, who had previously traveled with Paul on some missionary journeys. The Scriptures reveal Titus to be a man eager to jump in where needed, a man who wasn't afraid to work hard and didn't bend to peer pressure. Those were the perfect qualities for a man left alone on the island of Crete and charged with overseeing the growth of multiple churches. It couldn't have been easy for Titus to minister on Crete, for the Cretans were proud of their sin. In his letter to Titus, Paul even quoted a common saying they had about themselves: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (Titus 1:12). The Cretans reveled in their hard-heartedness, yet it was among these people that the gospel had made an inroad and lives had been transformed.

The Charge to Titus

And it was Titus's job on Crete to oversee these new believers and to train leaders in the fledgling churches. Wherever truth blossoms, false religions attempt to plant their noxious weeds of heretical teaching nearby, and Crete was no exception. Paul explained the psyche of the false teachers when he stated, "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed" (Titus 1:12).

In contrast to the false teachers' impure and greedy behavior and heretical teaching, Paul reminded Titus of his calling and his priorities as a pastor. Most likely Titus could hear Paul's voice ring in his ears as he

read from Paul's letter, "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine" (2:1). This was Titus's primary duty—to continuously preach and teach God's Word to the people, which would then equip them and help them to grow in the faith. Like lights on a runway which guide a plane to safety, so Titus 2:1 guides us toward the information that provides us with purpose, hope, and peace. What we read in Titus 2:1 shows us how valuable the details in the rest of the chapter are. Let's look together and see what verse 1 has to say to you and me.

The First Bookend of Titus 2

Every book lover knows the value of bookends. We have quite a few that grace the bookshelves in our living room, and I love finding new bookends that add grace and flair. Yet whether the bookends are nondescript pieces of aluminum or artistic sculptures, every one of them is designed for the same simple function: to showcase the books on the shelves. A bookend can have artistic and decorative merit, but it exists to display and support the books. And God has placed two wonderfully instructive bookends in Titus chapter 2 whose purpose is to *reveal the value* of the verses in between them. So let's examine both bookends, starting with the first one, which is Titus 2:1. What we learn from looking at its fine details will *prepare* our hearts for the priorities God has placed on the shelf.

Why Being Proper Is Important for You

Titus is exhorted to continuously teach the things *fitting* for every believer. Fitting—now *there's* a word we don't often hear these days. The word seems to belong to a different time and place, to a world in which people responded to "doing one's duty" and "doing what's right." Because it's not a commonly used term anymore, we need to pay careful attention to the word's meaning, for it alerts us to the great value of what is about to follow.

History reveals that codes of conduct and the sense of what is suitable continues to change. In fact it seems that the world's goal is to keep changing whatever is viewed as fitting or right. But God never

changes and His standard for suitable, proper, and fitting behavior for every believer remains the same. For example, in Ephesians 5:3-4 we read, “Immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is *proper* among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not *fitting*, but rather giving of thanks.” In those verses we learn what God considers appropriate behavior for believers.

So when we read in Titus 2:1 that Titus is to speak fitting, appropriate, and proper words that go along with sound doctrine, it decisively proclaims what God wants every believer to know about acting properly. Our goal as Christian women is to understand what is proper for us, and then to live it out because we love the Lord. The good news is we don't have to guess what things God considers fitting for Christian women because He lets us know in His Word!

Why Learning What Is Sound Is Important for You

When Titus was told to continuously teach the things proper and appropriate for believers to know, that meant he was to teach sound doctrine. A veterinarian might say, after examining a horse, that his legs are *sound*, or healthy. They aren't crippled or deficient in some way, but strong and whole. So when we hear the term sound doctrine, we can think of doctrine that is healthy, whole, and complete.

The physical fitness industry makes a mint off people's desire to be fit and healthy. No one wants to feel weak or physically unhealthy. And when it comes to our *spiritual fitness*, we should show even more concern about what's good for us. Thankfully, God hasn't left it up to us to figure out what things make for whole and healthy Christian living. Verses 2-10 of Titus chapter 2 reveal what we need to know, understand, and apply to our lives if we want to become spiritually fit.

Why Sound Doctrine Is Important for You

Everything that Paul tells Titus to teach the believers in Titus 2:2-10 matches up with sound doctrine. These characteristics complement the doctrines of God. In essence, sound doctrine holds hands with the priorities listed in verses 2-10.

You may be saying, “Sound doctrine? *Doctrine?* What is that? It sounds boring and a little scary.” But let me put your mind at ease. Doctrine is simply the collected instruction of the Bible designed to produce spiritual maturity and Christlikeness. Doctrine helps us become spiritually healthy. And we *all* need doctrine so we can grow more like Jesus.

Paul explains in 1 Timothy 4:6 that sound doctrine is something we nourish our souls with and then teach to others. When we feed upon the healthy doctrines of God’s Word, we grow spiritually strong, which actually sounds quite helpful and interesting!

Sound doctrine is for everyone. That’s why almost every people group that can be found in a church is addressed in Titus 2: older men, older women, young women, young men (including Titus), and even bondslaves. Paul even included himself in the closing verses. *No one* is left out. *Everyone* must receive counsel and instruction about how to grow in godliness, and that comes from sound doctrine.

The Second Bookend of Titus 2

With the first bookend in place, we can now turn our attention to the second bookend, which will help us gain a clearer understanding of God’s priorities. This bookend is found at the end of the chapter, in verse 15. Paul wrote, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.” You might be thinking, *Wow! That sounds serious.* You’re right, it *is* important. Commands like that are sure to capture anyone’s attention, and they were designed to capture ours!

Why “These Things” Are Important for You

So what was so important about “these things” that Paul wanted Titus to be sure to speak? Paul was referring to all the priorities and commands of verses 2-10, the godly priorities God has made known to all the members of the church. Every little detail and comment about older and younger men, older and younger women, and slaves is summed up in the two words “these things.”

With phrases like “speak and exhort and reprove,” “with all

authority,” and “let no one disregard you,” even if we are experiencing brain fog we can still figure out that whatever comes in between those bookends is not merely optional for us. *The information sandwiched between those “verse bookends” contains God’s will for us.* The bookend verses of Titus 2:1 and 2:15 not only showcase God’s priorities for us, they actually insist we listen to and heed them.

Why Regarding God’s Word Is Important for You

Titus 2:15, our second bookend, closes with the command to Titus, “Let no one disregard you.” Now that’s a tall order! Bible teacher John MacArthur stated that a pastor “has spiritual authority only to the extent that what he says conforms to God’s Word.”¹ So if a pastor is carefully and faithfully teaching God’s Word to us, and he gets to a section of Scripture that we would rather not hear, how should we respond? Titus 2:15 tells us: God’s Word is not to be disregarded.

We need to remember that the preaching of God’s Word is one of the means God has given to aid us in our spiritual growth, so whether we are hearing it taught or reading it ourselves, we mustn’t discount or trivialize His Word. Instead, we are to *really* listen to it and heed it. Everything we need to know for living the Christian life is contained in the pages of the Bible, and for us women, specific information about God’s priorities for us is detailed in Titus 2:3-5.

A SELECTIVE RESPONSE

Our middle child, Nate, was generally obedient and cheerful as he was growing up. But when he was little, if I called him to come to the dinner table while he was engrossed with his Legos, he wouldn’t respond! He wouldn’t even acknowledge he had heard my voice. I naively began to wonder if he had a hearing problem. But my wise husband devised a plan to test my theory.

One day when Nate was again playing with his toys, my husband had me call Nate to the table for dinner. No response, no turn of the head, nothing to indicate he heard me call him. Then my husband whispered one word in my ear: “Cookie.” Instantly, Nate perked up and popped into the kitchen looking for the cookies. I’d been had! But

that little story illustrates what Paul is conveying to Titus: “Don’t let anyone disregard God’s Word. The things you are communicating to them are too important, too valuable for them to ignore.”

If we desire to know God’s will for our lives, then we need to heed the Scriptures. God’s Word, after all, is God’s will!

A WHOLEHEARTED RESPONSE

We must eagerly value *all* of God’s Word and respond enthusiastically to all of it, not just select portions of it. When we have regard for something, we esteem it and pay attention to it. And just like our son Nate had to learn to regard my voice, whether the words *cookie* or *clean your room* were on my lips, so must we learn to regard God’s Word whenever we read it or hear it proclaimed because it is *God’s Word*.

Because Titus was teaching God’s Word, he was to make sure the people tuned in and listened. God had commanded it and communicated it for the blessing and benefit of His children, and He wanted His children to regard it as great treasure. This is true for us too. If we desire to know God’s will for our lives, then we need to heed the Scriptures. God’s Word, after all, is God’s will!

What the Bookends Tell You About God’s Priorities

Now you see the purpose of our little background lesson about the bookends of Titus 2:1 and 2:15. These bookends showcase the priorities of Titus 2:3-5 and reveal how highly God values them. The first bookend says, “As for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (verse 1). The second bookend says, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (verse 15). We see that all the instructions *between* the bookends are of utmost importance.

Even before we begin our tour of God’s unchanging priorities for women in the upcoming chapters, the bookends help us understand the supreme place priorities *must* have in our lives. And that’s probably

why you're reading this book. You want to know what God's priorities are for your life, and you want to live in such a way that you can effectively apply them.

God's Unchanging Priorities and You

God values the contents of Titus 2:3-5 to the point that He wants us to make sure that we hear it, regard it, and put it into action in our lives. These are God's priorities for us! And that's important information we don't want to miss. Yet frequently people dismiss the Bible's commands as being old-fashioned and irrelevant for today. And many women would like to believe God would change His mind if He really knew and understood our modern culture and their personal situations. Yet God truly does know the issues we face. He didn't make any mistakes giving us His Word exactly as we have it in our Bibles today. God knew *precisely* what He wanted to communicate for all time, *for our time*, and it is recorded in Titus 2:3-5.

Choosing to Do What God Wants

If we discount God's Word and refuse to apply it to our lives, we aren't rejecting the apostle Paul or even our pastor or Sunday school teacher. We are actually rejecting God Himself (1 Thessalonians 4:8). Too often believers act as if living the Christian life is like joining a health club where members can pick and choose whatever exercise machines and fitness classes are appealing to them. *They* choose the fitness activities they want to engage in, while the fitness center serves *them*. Many believers apply that kind of mentality to the Christian life today. The emphasis is upon what *they* want to do, how *they* want to live, and how *they* want to implement God's Word in their lives, rather than what *God* wants them to do, how *God* wants them to live, and how *God* wants them to implement His Word in their lives.

God called you to follow Him. He made this possible by sending His Son to die on the cross for your sins. If Christ has redeemed you from sin and death, then you owe Him a debt of love and gratitude. And it is that debt of love and gratitude that causes us to love what He loves and make His priorities our priorities.

Seeking God's Best for Your Life

Sometimes we make foolish, uninformed, or even selfish choices. It would be nice if we always knew the best thing for us to do. But we don't always know that. Yet the Lord does—He *always* knows what's best for us. And His best for us has been preserved in Titus 2:3-5. We don't need to try to figure out what's important to God; He's told us exactly what He considers important for Christian women. And that's the Titus 2:3-5 priorities He has for every one of His daughters.

Titus 2:3-5 isn't a take-it-or-leave-it passage. Within these verses are the unchanging priorities of God's heart for you, for me, and for every woman so we can live lives that are pleasing to Him. Knowing that, we must ask ourselves these questions: How do I *regard* God's priorities found in Titus 2:3-5? And how can I take these priorities to heart and *apply* them?

This is our opportunity to grasp these priorities with delight and trust, and seek to live them out for God's glory. Let's discover together what God desires for us!

God's Unchanging Priorities for You

Chapter 1 Study Questions

We need to understand God's plan for womanhood so we can cultivate proper attitudes toward all that He has called us to do. Titus 2:3-5 is not the only place we read about God's priorities for women, but within those three verses we find a concise and succinct definition of a woman's role and calling. The passage reveals the high standard of godly character all women are to embody, while addressing the priorities and ministries of women, whether in youth or old age. These verses are extremely practical and straightforward, leaving a well-marked path for us to follow.

Let's begin our study with a quick look at the structure and background of the book. It is important we take the time to do this because it will help us understand Titus 2:3-5 better.

1. Who is the author? What details do you learn about that author from the book of Titus?
2. To whom is the book written? What details do you learn about the recipients within the three chapters of Titus?
3. In a few sentences summarize the contents of chapter 1. As you write, imagine trying to explain what chapter 1 is about to a fourth grader.

Now summarize the contents of chapter 2.

Finally, summarize the contents of chapter 3.

4. What is the apostle Paul's purpose in writing the book? Cite the chapter and verse where you found your answer.

5. Following an author's train of thought from one chapter to another is an important Bible study technique, so let's put this rule of Bible study into practice: Explain how chapter 1 leads into our passage of Titus 2:3-5.

6. What do the verses immediately before and after Titus 2:3-5 talk about? How are they all related in subject?

7. Is Paul making suggestions for Christian character here, or are these commands to be obeyed? For a hint, read verse 15.

8. This isn't a take-it-or-leave-it passage. This is God's plan for the church, and His priorities for women. In what ways are you making it your business to "excel still more" in these areas?