This is Be Known, and I’m Kerrah Fabacher. You’re listening to episode \_\_\_57\_\_\_. We were made for relationship, but so often our relationships are broken. And when our relationships are broken, *we* are broken. One of our deepest human desires is to be known, but we often have lost ourselves along the way. This is a podcast to help you get your relationships back to a place of wholeness. A place of authentic connection, where you feel truly known.

So come on in and sit a while. Let’s exchange fear for love and finally see what good relationships are made of. And let’s see what kind of healing happens here.

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Man, welcome back. It’s good to be back with you after two months of a break from the show. The podcast doesn’t come in seasons, but there are several breaks throughout the year to give me time to breathe, rest, and brainstorm and organize new content ideas for you. But it is great to finally be back. I’ve also learned how I don’t create well when my kids are home because there’s too much stimulation and noise for me to reflect and write and all those kinds of things, so my break was a bit longer this summer than I anticipated as I was waiting to get my kids back in school so I had some margin I needed to create. So thanks for being patient with me, and for joining again today.

It’s weird how God changes things around, too. My plan wasn’t to welcome you guys back with the content I’m sharing today. But after I saw one of Dr. Camden Morgante’s Instagram posts on modesty culture and started having conversations with you in that space about it, too, I decided I can’t ignore this one.

Now hear me, I’m barely scratching the surface here, so just know there is so much more to this conversation than what we’ll be able to have today. Please feel free to email me with any more questions you’d like answered over at info@kerrahfabacher.com.

So let’s jump in.

Today we’re talking about modesty culture, body shame, and how to begin to change how we talk about this and what we teach young girls and women. If you’re a man listening to this episode, stick with me. This affects you, too.

Let’s first define modesty culture.

Right now in many Christian circles, people talk about different “cultures” that were taught (explicity or implicitly) in their homes and churches that weren’t handled well, honestly. Purity culture, for example. Like these whole movements of extreme, legalistic rules to follow and if one doesn’t, there’s a lot of shame there. So modesty culture was the movement in which young girls, teens, and young women were taught to be super modest to make sure they weren’t causing the guys around them to lust. That’s essentially what it was. We were supposed to protect them in that way.

Now, I’m sharing my perspective as a Southern white Christian woman in the U.S. I grew up in that culture. So a lot of what I’m saying today is a challenge to that specific culture. I know different places in the world and various ethnic and religious groups see these issues differently, and I don’t have time to get into all that today.

This is a conversation specifically about male-female relationships, and I get that not all males feel sexual attraction to females and visa versa. So if none of this resonates with you, I apologize about that.

Also, this is 2022. I know that covering women’s bodies has been a thing for forever and has manifested in different ways over time, and fashion has looked different, too. (As it still does in various parts of the world). So we’re not going to get lost in all those details today.

Where we’ll start instead is with how modesty culture affected me.

So I can think of so many examples to share with you; it’s kind of sad, but the one that stands out the most is when I was spending a summer with a bunch of college students doing ministry together. The girls had to wear one-piece swimsuits (and even had to wear shorts and t-shirts over them most of the time). I was already used to this. Every time I went to youth camp, it was the same rule. The guys got to wear swim shorts and no (because apparently girls don’t ever look at hot guy bodies, insert eye roll emoji), but we had to wear all of that to cover up. So the boys didn’t really see any parts of ours bodies that they could “lust” over. So I had this one piece I had bought that took me forever to find and looked great on me. But one of the leaders told me it showed too much of my cleavage, and I had to go buy another one. I’ll never forget this. I went Walmart with some of my friends to find another swimsuit. I was angry, embarrassed, felt like a little kid being reprimanded. And to top that off, I had no money. So I bought a new swimsuit and my bank account went in the negative. I cried so much about that. Like seriously? Because it showed an inch too much, I had to go in the negative in my bank account to make sure the boys didn’t see any tiny bit of my boobs.

A friend reminded me of something else similar that happened that summer, too. The boys gave the girls a list of things that we could do to help them not lust. I have no idea why they did this, but they did. One thing my friend remembered that was on that list was to not wear purses with straps that crossed over our chests because it made the boys want to look at our boobs. Like, is this real life? I’m not making this stuff up.

So many of you could probably tell me tons of stories about rules that were placed on you that are honestly kind of ridiculous, rules to cover your bodies so the guys won’t look and lust. Like what the actual frick is that?

Rules like, shorts need to be no more than 3 inches above the knees, no spaghetti straps, straps should be at least three fingers wide. Shirts can’t be fitted or show your tummy. And absolutely NO cleavage ever. God forbid. Dresses can’t be fitted or too short. Only one-piece swimsuits with t-shirts over the top. Like Y’all. This was an actual thing.

So many rules for girls only, it seemed, to cover their bodies. To cover their curves.

And because of that, we were always nervous about what we wore, like is this fitting into those rules? Omg, what if the boys actually look at my body? We had constantly be on edge and we felt so ashamed if something we wore was fitted or more low cut and too short.

And yes, it’s been worse in other time periods and is worse in some cultures, I get that.

But for those of us who grew up like this, it was so shaming and problematic.

*Because modestly culture leads to body shame and taking responsibility for something that isn’t yours.*

This greatly affects our relationships with our own bodies but also our relationships with others (men and women).

*Modesty leads to body shame* because it’s essentially telling you your body isn’t good because your body makes dudes lust. Your body makes dudes fantasize and maybe even masturbate. In other words, your body makes dudes sin. So your body needs to be covered and hidden. Your body isn’t good. Dr. Cmden Morgante says, “Modesty Culture leads to a lot of body shame and a sense that our bodies are inherently wrong, sinful, and can cause others to ‘stumble.’ It makes girls responsible for boys’ lust instead of empowering each gender to be responsible for their own thoughts and actions.” (Instagram)

This sounds familiar, huh?

In the garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and disobeyed God, the first thing they did was hide from Him. They were ashamed. Their sin separated them from Him. And they were ashamed of their bodies and their nakedness. Their bodies God created as good. That he never intended them to feel shame about. Yeh, those bodies. They hid. From him and from each other. And God’s like, how’d you know you were naked? In other words, what happened for you to start seeing your bodies as anything other than good? What happened to make you want to hide them? The fall affected how we see bodies. It was when body shame entered the picture.

It wasn’t ever supposed to be like this.

Now I’m not saying we all need to join naked colonies and never wear clothes again, but it is important to recognize that your body is good. Your body isn’t some sexual object that is the reason a man can’t control himself. Your body is good. You were made in the image of God, too.

*Modesty culture also makes women take responsibility for man’s actions*, and that’s seriously messed up. No one is responsible for anyone’s actions, thoughts, feelings, or behaviors other than their own. If I wear a bikini at the beach (and I do sometimes), it’s not MY fault if some dude starts fantasizing over me. I’m just there to tan and swim. He is in control of himself. He doesn’t have to let his brain go there. If I see a fit man in a swimsuit, it’s my responsibility (esp. as a married woman) to not let my eyes linger too long and not let my brain go too far. Can I think someone is attractive? Sure. But it’s my job to not let my thoughts go too far, and it’s a man’s job to do the same.

Well, Kerrah, men are more visual and just fantasize so much more than women. Their brains immediately go to sex. Okay, that’s what we’ve been taught as women, why we’re told to cover up. But I’d wager there’s a lot more to men than being some sort of sex animal. They can control themselves. And if their thoughts go too far, they’re responsible to reign them in.

That doesn’t mean we just put our bodies on display all the time either, I’m not saying that. I’m just saying those legalistic rules are a bit much and men are responsible for their own thoughts and behaviors. Period. And so are women.

Women, if you put on clothes specifically to lead a man to want you sexually, then I’d say, that’s not great. Unless its’s your spouse, then, have at it. But if you find yourself just looking for attention, specifically sexual attention, then that’s your responsibility to own up to and work on.

ENTER music—

I’m not sure there’s a black and white way to fix this issue. I do think, however, the legalistic rules can for the most part, be tossed. For women, we need to think about what we feel comfortable wearing. If you’re not comfortable wearing bikinis in front of other men, then don’t. But if you are, why not? If you are comfortable with crop tops, then wear them. If you’re not, then don’t. There’s a lot more grey here than there is black and white. We have to accept that. We as women (and men) do need to consider social and professional norms and dress appropriately, like I’m not showing up to counsel people in a crop top and shorts. But I may wear that to workout or go to Target, and there’s nothing wrong with that. There is gray here. Let’s be kind about that.

So we don’t need to be as focused on telling women what they can and can’t wear. Instead, we can teach them what true modesty actually looks like- which is humility and grace and a nonjudgmental attitude toward self and other people.

And men, you can teach younger guys to stop blaming women for their lust. Period. You can teach them to feel attraction without going too far in their minds. You can teach them to turn away if it’s that difficult.

We can respect our own bodies and others’ bodies by resisting seeing them as sexual objects, but as people created in the image of God. People created good.

We as the church need to be people of compassion and grace. Not people who keep adding more and more legalistic rules to scripture that shame people. Jesus couldn’t stand that when he walked this earth.

So we get off our high horses. And we stop making women feel so ashamed of the curves they’re in. We take responsibility for ourselves and live in a way that we believe is honoring the One who made us and our bodies good.

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Thanks for sitting a while with me. I trust that debunking modesty culture and fighting body shame will help you take a step toward wholeness so you can finally see what good relationships are made of.

If you need to work through some of the shame from past experiences and teachings like those in modesty culture, I’d love to work with you one-on-one through coaching. My heart is to help you have more whole relationships with yourself, with God, and with others. So please check out how to work with me at [www.kerrahfabacher.com/book-online](http://www.kerrahfabacher.com/book-online). I have a couple of coaching spots available.

To finish up, the transcript for this episode is on the podcast page on my website, kerrahfabacher.com.

A big thanks to my friend Robert Hargrove for creating the music for the show, and fellow hope\*writer, Alana Dawson, for being a great editor.

Until next time friend, I’ll see you soon.