

The top half of the image features a teal background with white dotted patterns of leaves and swirls. The text is centered in the upper portion.

foreword by
NANCY LEIGH DEMOSS

feminine
appeal

Carolyn Mahaney



Feminine Appeal

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Transformed by Titus 2

Racing the clock in rush-hour traffic, Lisa groaned as she saw the predictable bloom of brake lights in front of her. She was going to be late again to the daycare center. An adrenaline-driven surge of anxiety erupted.

“Come on, come on, come *on!*” she hissed at the cars ahead.

Arriving ten minutes late, she mentally calculated the fine levied on tardy parents while she hoisted her son Nate into his well-worn car seat. In between her son’s chatter on the way home, she tried to recall what she had purchased at the grocery store during her lunch hour. *Did I remember to put away the ice cream?* she wondered.

They arrived home only minutes before her husband, John, and their older son, Matthew. Entering the dark house, Lisa walked through the handsomely furnished rooms that sat empty all day and flicked on the overhead kitchen light. Grocery bags sat on every level surface, including the kitchen table.

One was leaking.

Dumping the melted ice cream in the trash, she popped something pre-made into the microwave. With one eye on the clock during dinner, Lisa estimated the amount of time she had to get the boys to bed and still pack for tomorrow’s trip.

“Come on, guys, let’s get ready for bed,” she said, pointing them toward the stairs.

Nate stopped at the door to the basement, an expansive playroom outfitted with a lavish collection of toys.

“Moh-mmeee,” whined the four-year-old, as he looked down the dark steps, “we didn’t even get to play with our *own* toys today.”

Irritation, guilt, and sympathy converged as she knelt to hug her child. Up close, she could see exhaustion spiked with contentious confusion in his face. But the schedule must go on. Up the stairs they went—the boys to bed, Lisa to her bedroom where the open suitcase sprawled on her side of the bed.

Something is very wrong here, she kept thinking to herself as she packed her bag by rote. This isn’t what the good life is supposed to feel like. Shoes? Check. Pantyhose? Check. But this is what I’ve chosen. Umbrella? Check. Phone adapter? Check. I’m the youngest vice president in company history. We have an impressive house in a good neighborhood. Prescriptions? Check. Toothbrush? Check. The boys are in the best daycare and preschool in town. We should be happy.

Why isn’t this satisfying? Why do I feel so overwhelmed?

My Girlhood Dream

Though I have never tried to juggle a full-time job and a family like my friend Lisa, I have my own memories of being completely overwhelmed.

Growing up in sunny, rural Sarasota, Florida, my dream was to one day become a wife and mother. Shortly after graduating from high school, I worked as a secretary for a Christian organization. There I met a young, exuberant preacher from the Washington, D.C. area named C. J. Mahaney, and I soon suspected my girlhood dream might come true. Sure enough, just three months after our first meeting, he proposed. Without hesitation, I said yes.

I did not consider it a hardship that I would need to leave the place where I had lived my whole life to join my new hus-

band in the suburbs of our nation's capital. I was not apprehensive about saying good-bye to everyone and everything I had ever known in order to be this man's wife. That is, until we got married. C. J. was twenty-one at that time. I was nineteen. I will never forget those early days as a new bride, now more than twenty-nine years ago.

Upon returning from our honeymoon, C. J. and I made our home in a tiny one-bedroom apartment. Though I loved being married, the cold winters of D.C. were not to my liking (I had never even seen snow before!). My husband and I were in love and the best of friends; however, I soon began to miss my family and friends in Florida, and new friendships were slow to develop.

But my greatest challenge—by far—was my desire to do this “wife thing” well, but I was not sure how to pull it off. I remember thinking: *I wish there were a crash course I could take for this.* I longed to have a strong, godly, joy-filled marriage, but I had seen so many marriages fail, even Christian marriages. And the couples all started out happy and in love like C. J. and me. Where did they go wrong? How could I make certain that we didn't end up in the same place?

I yearned for someone to give me direction and guidance—to share with me the essential ingredients for a successful marriage. I knew it involved more than cooking and cleaning the house. But beyond that, I wasn't sure where to begin.

The feelings of incompetence only grew stronger as children started to arrive. I became pregnant three months after our wedding. By age twenty-one, I had an infant and a one-year-old. In those first two years of marriage, there were days when I felt my battle with homesickness *and* morning sickness (more like all-day sickness) would never end. I had no prior experience caring for children, and to say the least, I felt inadequate and unprepared.

What Is Good?

Maybe you recognize yourself in Lisa's story. You find that life is galloping by at a furious pace, and you are frantically trying

to catch your breath. You wonder if you are making the right choices.

Or perhaps you identify more with my life. You are a full-time homemaker, but still you are overwhelmed by all your responsibilities. You wish you knew of a better way to carry out this enormous task.

Isn't it telling that our culture requires training and certification for so many vocations of lesser importance, but hands us marriage and motherhood without instruction? Fortunately, God hasn't left us to fend for ourselves. He has provided invaluable wisdom for women in His Word.

If we question whether we are investing our lives in what is truly important, we have received the plumb line for women straight from holy Scripture. Look at the clear instructions found in the second chapter of Titus, verses 3 to 5:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

More than any other, this section of Scripture has shaped my own understanding of biblical womanhood. This passage set the standard and provided the direction I so desperately needed in those early years of marriage. And for the past twenty-nine years, these words have guided me in my role as a wife and mother.

Not only has Titus 2 transformed my life, but I've seen it revolutionize the lives of countless other women. No matter what your age or season of life—whether you are a grandmother or a high school student—this passage is applicable to you.

In this book we will explore the rich, wonderful counsel that the Lord provides for women in Titus 2. One chapter each will be devoted to “what is good”—loving our husbands, loving our children, self-control, purity, working at home, kindness, and submission in marriage. (Did you raise your eyebrows at

the mention of submission? It's not a popular word today, but stick with me, and you'll probably be surprised and encouraged by the reason the Lord listed it among "what is good.")

The Mentoring Mandate

The seven feminine virtues listed in Titus 2 are prefaced with a clear call to action for older women: "Teach what is good, and so train the young women."

I longed for this kind of help and instruction in my early years of marriage and motherhood. I earnestly desired to have a more experienced, godly woman to whom I could go for advice.

My mom was an excellent role model who made caring for a family look effortless. But she was a thousand miles away, and I couldn't contact her on a daily basis. How I wished I had paid closer attention when I lived at home!

As the first among my friends to have a baby, I had no one close by whom I could ask for help. I felt very alone in this daunting task of being a wife and mother.

I remember one unhelpful method (among many) I followed with my first child, Nicole. To keep her from crying, I would nurse (and in later months, bottle-feed) her until she fell asleep. Then I would *very carefully* lay her in bed. If she woke up in the process—which happened frequently, I might add—I would have to start the whole operation over again. This ordeal could take up to an hour and a half at every naptime and nightly bedtime. To say the least, it was an exhausting and time-consuming routine.

I continued this faulty practice until my second daughter, Kristin, was born fourteen months later. My mother was visiting to help me with the girls, and she observed my effort to care for a newborn while maintaining this bedtime practice with Nicole. "Carolyn," she admonished, "you need to put Nicole to bed and just let her cry."

I was desperate at this point; so without hesitation I followed her counsel. The first night Nicole cried for fifteen minutes. The

next day for her nap, she whimpered only a few moments. That night she went to sleep without crying. To think I had spent all those months going through that arduous routine! How much time and effort would have been saved if only I had received the simple, practical advice of an older woman.

Our Titus 2 passage exhorts older women to provide this kind of assistance for young women. If you are an older woman, may I appeal to you to take up this challenge? Young women are in dire need of your training and instruction.

To function in this role you need not have the gift of teaching or be a theological expert; it simply requires you to possess proven character (as outlined in verse 3). The years have brought you much knowledge and insight, and you have a significant role to play in the church. You have discovered secrets of godly wisdom in relation to husbands, children, and the home that could save younger women a lot of unnecessary trouble and concern.

Author and speaker Elisabeth Elliot encourages older women in this way:

It would help younger women to know there are a few listening ears when they don't know what to do with an uncommunicative husband, a 25-pound turkey, or a two-year-old's tantrum.

It is doubtful that the Apostle Paul had in mind Bible classes or seminars or books when he spoke of *teaching* younger women. He meant the simple things, the everyday example, the willingness to take time from one's own concerns to pray with the anxious mother, to walk with her the way of the cross—with its tremendous demands of patience, selflessness, lovingkindness—and to show her, in the ordinariness of Monday through Saturday, how to keep a quiet heart.

These lessons will come perhaps most convincingly through rocking a baby, doing some mending, cooking a supper, or cleaning a refrigerator. Through such an example, one young woman—single or married, Christian or

not—may glimpse the mystery of charity and the glory of womanhood.¹

Of all the mentoring relationships among women, none is more significant than the one between a mother and her daughter. Those of us who have been blessed with daughters have the opportunity and, indeed, the obligation to emphasize the feminine qualities of Titus 2 in our teaching repertoire.

We must instruct them how to love their future husbands and how to love their future children, in the likely event that God has that plan for their lives. We must train them how to be self-controlled, pure, kind, workers at home, and submissive.

We live in a society that emphasizes preparation and education for everything *but* marriage, motherhood, and homemaking. Therefore, we must give this profession our highest attention when it comes to preparing our daughters for their futures.

May I also encourage those of you who are single? If marriage and motherhood are in your future, *now* is the time to prepare for that profession. Even if you remain single, you can still cultivate biblical femininity by studying this passage. It will instruct you in how to care for the marriages and children of those closest to you. You don't have to draw from personal experience; you still have the truth of God's Word to train the younger women in your life.

Clearly, Titus 2 exhorts *all* women to perceive the value of being mentored and being a mentor. Younger women should consistently pursue more mature women to learn from their wisdom and experience. Older women should prayerfully consider the younger women that God has brought into their lives, in order to encourage and support them.

A Mentoring Story

It was the friendship and counsel of an older woman that God used to influence my friend Lisa. Though Lisa had been attending church services periodically, she didn't know the truth of the

gospel and was only living for herself. However, she encountered God, and He turned her life upside down. He shook loose all her previous concepts of femininity, marriage, and motherhood. She tells her experience:

I grew up at a time when women were making a name for themselves. In their own right, they were being promoted into the “men only” fields without the obstacles or prejudices of the past. Women were prompted to put themselves where they could make their mark. I never heard anyone talk or teach about raising a family or being a wife.

In my family, I was encouraged to pursue my interests, study hard, and have a shining career. I remember in college my friends and I would talk about careers, strategies, and positions of rank. We always pictured ourselves as successful executives. I specifically recall tossing around the idea of not having children.

My path into corporate America was incredibly easy. I had a wonderful job waiting for me out of college. From there the climb was more like a ride in a glass elevator. At the age of twenty-eight, I had my CPA license and found myself the comptroller of a multimillion-dollar corporation and the youngest vice president in company history.

But with success came resentment that I was tied down with a family. I had to decline a promotion and an opportunity to move abroad. I had two young sons, and my husband was in a nowhere job. My family felt like the chains of Jacob Marley. I couldn't see the joy in having a family—only the glory I was missing. I was in a mental trap that I didn't perceive.

Through a series of God-ordained “coincidences,” several people recommended the same church to John and Lisa. One Sunday they decided to visit, and on that day the pastor clearly presented the gospel and preached about the eternal importance of family. The message pierced Lisa's heart. Drawn by the teaching and life of the church community, they began to attend

this new church. Not much later, Lisa repented of her sins and became a Christian.

Soon the conversations at work about vacations, wardrobes, and material success that she once enjoyed seemed silly and selfish. Instead Lisa began to prize the biblical roles of wife and mother. Eventually, John and Lisa agreed it was time to sell their big house, buy a less expensive place to live, and prepare for Lisa to come home full time. It took the better part of a year to sell the house, during which time she turned down a promotion that would have doubled her salary. This ordeal tested her faith.

I struggled even as I tried to obey. I knew my life needed to be in God's ordained order. But I wondered if I could really do this.

As we prepared to move, I befriended a woman in my church who helped me pack a little every day for a month. During our times together, she would listen patiently and help me in practical ways. She continually quoted Scripture, targeting my doubts. It wasn't always what I wanted to hear. Nevertheless, it was always what I *needed* to hear.

My husband got a new job, one he loves to go to every day. We found a bargain home in a modest neighborhood close to our church community. I'm home with my boys. We live on less money, but we really lack nothing.

But that's not even the best part. Now we are involved in each other's lives. I really know my husband and my children. My boys are learning, happy, and love the Lord, and I am already seeing the fruit of my labors.

As much as the Lord has blessed our family, over the years He has also used this change in our lives to reach others. Former colleagues and disinterested family members have started asking questions about our faith and are reading the Bible. The witness of our life together even made my skeptical oldest sister comment, "Maybe there is something to this God thing!"

Isn't that exciting? It's the Titus 2 principle at work! One

older woman in the faith mentoring a new convert and helping her make a transition to being at home, caring for her sons, and supporting her husband. In turn, Lisa is able to train and encourage other women in her church; and the transformation in her life is a witness to unbelieving family members and friends.

The Grand Purpose

Now there are many Christian women who agree with and adhere to the virtues listed in Titus 2, but are unaware of the ultimate purpose of these practical applications. These women are avid proponents of society's need to return to "traditional values;" yet that is not what this passage is advocating. We are *not* commanded to love our husbands and to love our children so we can have strong, happy families like those from a previous era. To be sure, we experience enjoyable and fruitful family relationships when we follow God's instructions. But there is a far higher call.

On the other hand, there are Christian women who reject some of these virtues because they regard them as restrictive and outdated. They single out "working at home" and "submissive to their own husbands" as purely cultural requirements that are not applicable in modern society. However, that idea is erroneous. This passage remains authoritative and relevant for women today.

The commands found in Titus 2 have been given to us for an all-important reason that transcends time and culture. *That reason is the gospel of Jesus Christ.* These virtues are not about our personal fulfillment or individual preference. They are required for the sake of unbelievers—so that those who are lost might come to know our Savior.

This purpose is stated in verses 5, 8, and 10. We are to love our husbands and children, pursue self-control and purity, be workers at home, kind and submissive:

that the word of God may not be reviled. (v. 5)

so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. (v. 8)

so that in everything [we] may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. (v. 10)

Our conduct has a direct influence on how people think about the gospel. The world doesn't judge us by our theology; the world judges us by our behavior. People don't necessarily want to know what we believe about the Bible. *They want to see if what we believe makes a difference in our lives.* Our actions either bring honor to God or misrepresent His truth.

I recall my sadness when I heard of a high-profile Christian woman who left her husband for another man. My heart ached when I thought of the pain that this caused her family. But the effect of her sin didn't end there. When she broke God's command and committed adultery, her behavior reviled God's Word—before every person she knew and more she didn't know. Even the mainstream media snickered at the hypocrisy they perceived in her life. Her sinful conduct gave opponents of the gospel the chance to speak evil about Christians.

Although our daily actions might not be covered on the evening news, our lifestyle speaks loudly to those around us. How sobering it is to realize that our behavior has the potential to discredit the gospel. But how exciting it is to think that we can actually *commend* the gospel!

As verse 10 says, we can “adorn” the gospel with our lives. To “adorn” means to put something beautiful or attractive on display—like placing a flawless gemstone in a setting that uniquely shows off its brilliance. The gospel is like the most valuable of jewels. It is *the pearl* of great price.

Make no mistake, by adorning the gospel, we are not enhancing or improving it. The gospel cannot be improved! But by cultivating the feminine qualities listed in Titus 2, we can present the gospel as attractive, impressive, and pleasing to a watching world.

Several years ago while we were on a family outing, a gentleman approached my husband and said, “Sir, I've been observing

you for some time, and I have never seen a family relate like yours. How do you do it?”

My husband and I and our children had simply been enjoying one another’s company—laughing together and showing affection. But what was ordinary interaction between our family members was curiously attractive to this stranger. Our behavior provided C. J. the opportunity to share the gospel with him.

My husband explained that we are simply a family of sinners—but sinners whose lives have been transformed by the power of the gospel. And *that* was the reason for the difference this man observed.

Although we might not always be aware, people are watching our lives. If we exhibit the qualities from Titus 2 such as love for our families or purity or kindness, we are promoting the gospel. And the unbelievers who see us—be they family member, friend, neighbor, or stranger—may actually be drawn to the gospel by the way we live. How extraordinary!

Feminine Appeal

This book is about the transforming effect of the gospel—because that is what Titus 2 is all about. The climax of Titus 2 announces that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” It heralds the news of “our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness” (vv. 11-14).

The seven feminine virtues we will consider in this book are not an end in themselves. They point to the transforming effect of the gospel in the lives of women—women who have turned from their sins and trusted in the Savior, women whose sins have been forgiven and whose hearts have been changed.

Can you conceive of anything that sets forth the beauty of the gospel jewel more brilliantly than the godly behavior of those who have received it? Consider the loveliness of a woman who passionately adores her husband, who tenderly cherishes her children, who creates a warm and peaceful home, who

exemplifies purity, self-control, and kindness in her character and who gladly submits to her husband's leadership—for all the days God grants her life. I dare say there are few things that display the gospel jewel with greater elegance. This is true *feminine appeal*.

You hold in your hands a guide to spiritual maturity and an opportunity to embrace God's plan for you as a woman, a wife, a mentor, and a mother. In this book of instruction for women of all ages, Carolyn Mahaney explores seven virtues from Titus 2 that have transformed her life and the lives of countless other women. Learn how to live with true feminine appeal and become a woman who lives for God and helps others to do the same.



“Offers the mature mentoring that women of every age yearn for. This may be an excellent stand-in for the mentor you lack, or it will wonderfully complement the relationship you already have.”

John and Noël Piper, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minnesota

“We’ll give this book our ultimate endorsement—we have given it to all our married daughters!”

Dennis and Barbara Rainey, FamilyLife Today

“Biblical, practical, honest, gracious, and from the heart. We highly recommend this book.”

Randy and Nanci Alcorn, Eternal Perspective Ministries

“Carolyn writes with a wonderful blend of soundness, encouragement, humility, and practicality that makes this book one of the best on the market for women desiring to please God.”

Mark and Connie Dever, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington DC

“Helps women recover the nearly lost treasure of God’s way of thinking and living.”

Nancy Leigh DeMoss, host and teacher for *Revive Our Hearts*

Carolyn Mahaney is a wife, mother, homemaker, author, and speaker who blogs about biblical womanhood with her three daughters at girltalkhome.com. With over 30 years ministry experience, Mahaney has spoken at churches and conferences, including those of Sovereign Grace Ministries, the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and the Gospel Coalition.

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