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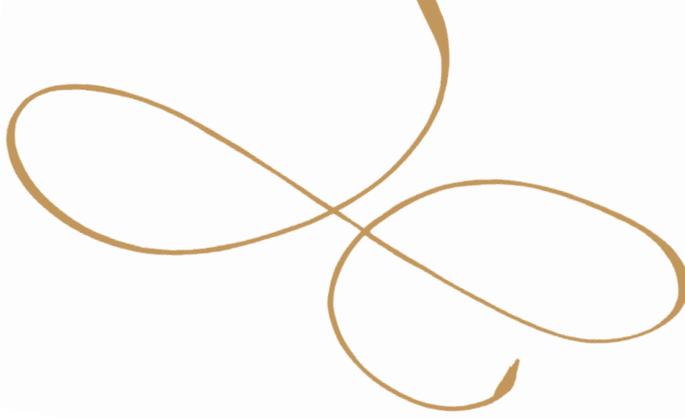
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Tying It All Together . . . Beautifully

“that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior”

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Teach what accords with sound doctrine.

Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled,
sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.

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.

**... so that in everything they may adorn
the doctrine of God our Savior.**

TITUS 2:1–5, 10

CHAPTER 1

A Woman Adorned and Adorning

Beauty Secrets of Titus 2

*Let us rejoice and exult,
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure.*

REVELATION 19:7-8

IT HAD BEEN A SHORT NIGHT OF SLEEP. But that didn't matter to me. I knew this day—Saturday, November 14, 2015—would be one I'd never forget. At the age of fifty-seven, I was about to be a bride for the first time. Today I would say “I do” before God and several hundred witnesses and become Mrs. Robert Wolgemuth. It was a day I had eagerly anticipated and for which I had been earnestly preparing for months.

My phone alarm woke me at 5:15 a.m. An hour later, a sweet young friend and her husband knocked on the door of my hotel

room. Emerging into the predawn stillness, we drove twenty minutes through the western Chicago suburbs and finally pulled into a vacant church parking lot in Wheaton, Illinois.

Inside the church, we were directed to a small, sparsely furnished room, where over the next few hours a transformation would take place. I slipped on a robe and took a seat as first a hair stylist, then a makeup artist, quietly got busy. We had been through trial runs, so they knew just what to do.

My wedding gown, purchased months earlier, painstakingly altered and carefully steamed by a friend the night before, hung off to the side, ready for me to slip into. An elegant bracelet and “diamond” earrings sat out on a table along with sparkly silver shoes—which yet another friend would take to a shoe store as soon as it opened so they could be stretched. (They were brand-new and killing my feet!) Everything was ready to complete the ensemble.

Why was I going to all this trouble? Why was I getting more dressed up than I had ever been in my life? Why had I endured the seemingly endless attention to details that commandeered my life over so many months? Why did I enlist and gratefully accept the help of so many friends who had plenty of other important things to do?

I’ll tell you why. All the time, thought, money, and effort expended for that one day were for a single purpose. I wanted to be *adorned*—beautiful, ready for my bridegroom. And I wanted to *adorn* my husband-to-be with my affection and attention. I wanted him to be honored and admired by others. I wanted our guests to see how much I loved this man and what a gift he was to me.

We had decided to take our photos prior to the wedding ceremony. So promptly at nine-thirty, arrayed in my dress, train, and white faux-fur wrap, I was carefully loaded into a car that would take me to an outdoor location nearby for our photo shoot.

Robert was already at the site, his back toward me. On cue, he turned around to get his first glimpse of the adorned bride he had only

been able to picture in his mind till that moment. His response—the look in his eyes, his involuntary gasp—was priceless to me. It made all the effort worthwhile.

We walked the fifty feet or so toward each other, bracing against the brisk, late fall chill, our hearts warmed with each other's presence. Robert reached out to embrace me, and I fell into his arms.

Never had I felt more beautiful.

Woman to Woman

Back in the bride's room, just moments before the ceremony was to begin, as Robert and I and several others were tending to last-minute details, someone came in to let me know that one of our guests had asked to pray with me before the wedding.

Vonette Bright, a dear, lifelong friend, was like a second mother to me. Eighty-nine years old and widowed for a dozen years, she had been battling leukemia and had just been told she had only months to live. But she had been eager to be at my wedding if it was the last thing she did—and she'd made it. (As it turned out, she would be with the Lord just six weeks later.)

I was eager to see this beloved friend, so we invited her to join us for a few moments. Vonette's caregiver gently pushed her wheelchair into the room. Beautifully dressed in bright red, Vonette turned a radiant countenance toward us. We circled around her wheelchair as cameras flashed and video rolled and this venerable woman of God led us in prayer, blessing our marriage.

When she finished, Vonette turned to me and whispered, "I had hoped to be able to speak to you alone." In response, I quickly asked everyone to clear the room. Then she turned to me and spoke gently but forthrightly: "Honey, I'm a mama . . . and I'd like to know . . . Is there anything you'd like to ask a mama before you get married?"

No cameras or recorders were privy to the sweet exchange that

took place in those next few moments, but that scene and our conversation will forever be etched on my heart.

A woman in the winter of her life imparting encouragement and exhortation to a woman in an earlier season who was eager to glean everything she possibly could.

A seasoned wife—having enjoyed a vibrant, loving marriage for fifty-four years—mentoring a novice in how to make much of Christ in her own marriage.

Two women, one older and the other younger, living out the beauty of the gospel—together.

Woman to woman.

The picture brings to mind another pair of women. I envision the elderly Elizabeth, after decades of infertility and unfulfilled longings, now supernaturally expecting a son . . . taking Mary of Nazareth into her heart and home . . . imparting faith and wisdom to the teenage virgin in whose womb was miraculously growing an infant who would one day be our Savior.

Precious little is recorded of their conversation, but what was preserved for us speaks to the beauty of the gospel being lived out by women walking in company with each other. Women whose lives are adorned by the presence of Christ and who adorn His gospel and make it believable for the next generation by their humble, joyful obedience.

After Vonette had shared with me what was on her heart, she took my hands in hers and once again prayed, praising our Father for the wedding about to take place and pleading for His blessing and favor on the marriage to follow. One could almost hear heaven whisper *Amen*.

That small, plain room, littered with hair and makeup gear, assorted clothing items, jewelry, and more, was transformed, through the Spirit of God knitting our hearts together, into a place of beauty, a temple adorned by and for the living Christ.

The Loveliness of Christ

As this modern-day Elizabeth and I exited that holy place, we could hear strains of the prelude flowing from the nearby sanctuary. Magnificent.

Not wanting to miss a moment of the celebration, Robert and I made our way to a secluded room just off the balcony, where we could see and hear the prelude and the first part of the worship service until it was time for the processional to begin.

The sanctuary with its colonial design was a visual feast. Tall, gleaming organ pipes lining the chancel wall. Gold banners proclaiming “Worthy is the Lamb” and “Unto Him be the glory.” Massive arrangements of red roses and white calla lilies adorning the platform, with sprays of roses and ribbons at the end of the pews. Candles in elegant gold and silver stands. Exquisite.

And in the center of it all, prominently displayed on the platform, a twelve-foot, rough-hewn cross that made the whole setting even more striking.

For was it not at Calvary that our Savior took upon Himself the rags of our sin and shame, adorning us in exchange with the robes of His righteousness? Is not the cross the only source of any eternal beauty we may ever hope to experience or to offer other souls starved for love and loveliness?

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress.¹

At the beginning of the ceremony, ten young girls whose families I have known and loved for years processed down the aisle ringing tiny bells. They were attired in darling dresses—some red, others white—with tights and fancy shoes, their hair curled and styled so sweetly.

A photo of the ten children surrounding the bride, all of us seated

on steps at the front of the church, brought tears to my eyes the first time I saw it. For in these precious, beautifully dressed girls, I saw ten young women of God in the making.

I love the thought of inspiring those girls with a vision of what it means to be a bride who has experienced the love and grace of Christ and who radiates His beauty to others. I pray they will grow to have hearts that are adorned with grace and that their lives will adorn the gospel of Christ for their generation.

Children adorned. Guests adorned. A sanctuary adorned. A bride adorned.

All of it intended to fulfill the vision Robert and I had for our wedding from the time we announced our engagement—namely, *to showcase the loveliness of Christ*.

Or, as the apostle Paul put it in the second chapter of the book of Titus, to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (v. 10).

Love and Beauty

Women love beauty. We enjoy the process of adorning ourselves and our environment.

Shopping for the clothes, makeup, or jewelry that will help us look our best.

Picking paint and accessories to make our homes more welcoming or comfortable or fashionable.

Carefully garnishing the food we put on the table.

Dressing our little ones in cute outfits.

Adding those special touches that make our surroundings, our relationships, and our activities a little more beautiful and personal and fun.

There’s just something about assembling and creating beauty that’s deeply satisfying.

And *feeling* beautiful—that’s a longing deep in many women’s hearts that has spawned and fueled countless industries.

I've never considered myself to be particularly beautiful in a physical sense. It's not that I think I'm unattractive or that I think there's something wrong with physical beauty. It's just not something I've focused on a whole lot. Mindful of the fleeting, deceptive nature of external beauty, I've tried to focus on cultivating the kind of beauty that can't be photographed (or photoshopped)—beauty of character and the heart.

Yet I can still remember how my heart skipped a beat the first time Robert told me I was beautiful.

I grew up in a loving home with a dad who adored me. I've been blessed to have many good, kind men in my life. It's possible my memory has failed me. But prior to that point, I cannot recall ever hearing a man say to me, "You're beautiful."

Robert kept telling me I was beautiful. He really seemed to mean it. And gradually I began to believe that he truly saw me that way—even when I had just finished working out at the gym, even on days when I hadn't taken time to apply makeup or fix my hair. As our courtship progressed, I told a friend, "I don't think there is anything I could do that would make him love me less or think I'm less beautiful."

But I also noticed that something even more significant was happening. As the persistent, gentle love of this man took root in my heart, it had a tenderizing, beautifying effect. In fact, to my amazement, people began to comment on my new "glow." Over and over again on my wedding day, friends said to me, "You're so beautiful!"

*Our calling is to make His love
and His truth visible, believable,
and beautiful to skeptical
observers.*

I say this not to shine a spotlight on myself, but to make the observation that to be adorned with another's love is to develop a greater capacity to reflect love and beauty to others.

You see, God has placed us here on earth as ambassadors of the gospel of Christ. And our calling as His followers is to make His love and His truth visible and believable—and beautiful—to skeptical observers.

Because they see it in *us*. Because they see it *changing* us.

His love making us beautiful. Adorning us.

And, through us, adorning His gospel.

Why We Need Each Other

It's a wonderful picture, isn't it?

But sadly—as you and I well know—it doesn't always work that way.

We may claim to love Jesus, but for some reason people don't always see His beauty reflected in our attitudes and actions. They don't always see in us the transforming power of His love.

Instead, too often, they see women who are just as overwhelmed, preoccupied, petty, or unloving as everyone else around us. If we're honest, that's the way we sometimes see ourselves.

But we long to do better. We really do want our lives to show the gospel in its very best light—even when we're

- up to our elbows in work and family life, with little time for personal prayer and Bible reading
- doubled over in worry and frustration because of a child who's running hard from God
- suffering through a lonely, loveless stretch of marriage with a husband who's pulled away
- retired to a shallow routine of crawling out of bed, making the coffee, watching television, and working the morning crossword puzzle
- or perhaps trapped in one of those tedious, one-foot-in-front-of-the-other seasons of life when the motivation to press on is almost more than we can muster.

But *how* do we do better? That's the question, isn't it?

How in the world do we manage to adorn the gospel and let it adorn us in the midst of our mundane or agonizing realities?

With help.

Lots of help!

The good news is that this task of being adorned by the gospel and enhancing the way it's perceived by others isn't something we're called to do alone. To help us accomplish what He has given us to do, God has graciously given us His Spirit and His church. And for us women, God has given us a community of other believing women for inspiration and support.

On my wedding weekend, a cadre of women friends, younger and older, banded together to provide personal and practical support in every way imaginable. The dear friend who took me to get my nails done (and secretly paid the bill). The young woman who accompanied me to the church for my makeup routine. Loving friends who baked and decorated cupcakes and others who managed guest lists and cared for administrative details for four different events. The sweet women who slipped away early from the reception to adorn Robert's and my hotel suite with an abundance of flowers, candles, and tasty snacks.

The love and combined efforts of these special women (along with many kind, helpful men) resulted in an indescribably lovely weekend. I couldn't have done it without the encouragement and help they provided. And in much the same way, I can't make it through life without walking in community with women who band together to support and beautify each other in Christ.

I need older women like my friend Vonette, who prayed for me from the time I was a child, watched me grow into a woman, often spoke into my life with wisdom, vision, and faith, and then, near the end of her life, endured the rigors of travel to be there for me and to share her love and wisdom when I got married.

I also need younger women in my life, even girls as young as those

sweet little women-to-be who participated in my wedding. They help keep me from becoming narrow and brittle, and they bring me such joy and hope.

And I need women in my own season of life—like a small group of “sisters” I am a part of who gather periodically, on the phone or in person, for mutual encouragement, accountability, and prayer. I treasure the companionship and influence of these women in my life.

The biblical model of older women living out the gospel and training younger women to do the same is vital for all of us to thrive.

Older women, younger women, women who are peers—we all need each other if we are to adorn the gospel and show its beauty in our lives. And that reality brings us back to Titus 2 and the heart of this book. Because this important passage offers a primer for how and why this all works. It paints

for us a picture of generational wisdom flowing downhill into inexperienced hearts, where it can cycle around and back up again in a continual process of godly care and counsel.

Woman to woman.

Older to younger.

Day to day.

Life to life.

This is God’s good and beautiful plan. The biblical model of older women living out the gospel and training younger women to do the same, of younger women recognizing the value of older women in their lives—of women adorning the gospel together—is vital for all of us to thrive. Living our lives as Titus 2 women enables us to fulfill the purpose for which we were created. It helps our families and churches to flourish and the beauty of the gospel to shine forth in our world.

Together in the Race

We sometimes hear life compared to a marathon, the defining mark of which is *endurance*. And for sure, the race of life calls for endurance over the long haul.

But life is so much more than just staying the long course, gritting our teeth and enduring. We're also meant to grow, thrive, and celebrate. We're meant to enjoy beauty—awe-inspiring, life-enriching, God-exalting beauty.

And we're meant to experience the strength and encouragement that flow out of doing life together, helping each other live gospel-adorned lives that in turn adorn the gospel in the eyes of the world.

So I like to envision us Christian women participating in another kind of race. We're not just solo competitors slogging it out toward a distant finish line. Instead, we're a team. We run *together*.

Think of it as a *relay*—passing the baton from one person to another, each of us involved in the process, both giving and receiving as we press on toward our destination. It's teamwork, not just individual performance, that counts.

Or think of it as one of those charity runs where we all move forward in a group, helping one another, pooling our energies for the sake of a beloved cause. Knowing that our individual efforts count but that it's not entirely up to us to make it happen—and that the race itself has meaning, not just crossing the finish line.

Picture a vast field of runners—some older, some younger, some more mature, some less seasoned—and you and me, right there with them. We each need our own, personal relationship with God and His Word, of course, but we are not running by ourselves. God intends for our lives to intersect with one another, to carry each other forward under the strong, victorious, beautiful banner of Christ.

Now if all of this seems a bit too philosophical and esoteric, I assure you the practical implications will soon be clear. And they are huge,

because this marathon, this relay, this race for a cause runs right through your living room. The baton passes directly over your kitchen table and through seemingly insignificant conversations and encounters.

When older women and younger women support each other in living out God's transforming love, the entire body of Christ grows more beautiful.

This is for you and me . . . real women living real, everyday lives.

And when it's working, believe me, it *works*. When older women choose to invest themselves in the lives of younger women, whole families and churches feel

the blessing. When young moms and singles widen their close-knit groups to include women who have already run a few laps and lived to tell about it, both sides of the relationship are strengthened and grow. When older women and younger women support each other in living out God's transforming love, the entire body of Christ—the bride of Christ—grows more beautiful.

So if you're an *older woman* (and willing to admit it—as I am), the message of this book is for you.

And if you're a *younger woman* (as I still am to some), the message of this book is for you too. It's for all of us—because each of us is an older woman to somebody and each of us is a younger woman to someone else. And each of us, in different ways, in different seasons, can be on both the giving and receiving end of this life-to-life process.

Where We Begin

The heart of this powerful pattern can be seen in a single paragraph of Titus 2. And yet the rich, practical, gospel-drenched insight found in Titus 2:3–5 is sufficient to keep us nourished and growing for a lifetime.

These words were originally written by the apostle Paul to a young pastor named Titus, who was struggling to lead a church on the island of Crete. The Roman Empire, which ruled Crete, was just coming under the tyrannical reign of the ruthless emperor, Nero. Just imagine what Nero's maniacal threats felt like to the fledgling churches of his day, especially when his government officially outlawed Christianity throughout the empire.

Do you think it's hard being a Christian today? Try knowing you're a hunted species. Try thinking that if this young, revolutionary movement is to survive, plans must be put in place both to spread and to deepen its impact. It can't just be a religious order or a theological system; the gospel must soak through people's hearts and lives and families so pervasively that no emperor, no persecution, no reviling would be able to rock the church of Christ from its foundations. No amount of pressure, fear, or fatigue could dilute the church to the point that it would lose its light—its distinctiveness, vibrancy, and impact in the world.

Those were some of the concerns behind Paul's letter to Titus. Christians were wondering:

- How are believers supposed to think and act in such times?
- How can we keep from being deceived by false doctrine and teachers?
- How can we pass our faith on to the next generation, rather than seeing it become extinct?
- How can the church not just survive, but thrive, in a world that is hostile to our faith?
- How can we effectively fulfill our mission to reach a corrupt world with the beauty of Christ's gospel?

Sound familiar? Those questions are still with us.

Which is why we still need the book of Titus today.

We may not live in Nero's Rome, but we do live in a decadent,

deceptive culture that threatens the church of Christ with its allure as well as its accusations and attacks. We need help to see how our lives can portray the gospel so beautifully that others see in us the transforming power of Christ and are drawn to know and follow Him. And (dare we say it?) we need help keeping His gospel attractive enough to *ourselves* that we—who claim to believe it—will actually trust Him, obey Him, and experience the power, peace, and joy He promises, even while living as exiles on this earth.

We all need to understand how to adorn the teaching of the gospel of Christ with the way we live—and to help each other do the same. And that’s exactly what Titus 2 provides for us. With its succinct summary of the character qualities that delight God’s heart and attract the hearts of those around us, this passage provides a timeless curriculum meant to be handed down from generation to generation. It lets older women know what is most important to share and younger women know what they’re called to aspire to become.

Years ago, when I first began preparing to teach on this theme, I read this short book of the Bible scores of times—meditating on it, memorizing it, pondering individual words, letting my spirit soak in it.

I hope you’ll do the same. Read it over and over again—all three chapters at first, to give you the overall setting, then narrowing down to chapter 2, with special emphasis on verses three through five. Immerse yourself in the text and its meaning because this is a passage you and I need to *get*. The more we let it define our lives and relationships, the more lovely Christ will be to us, and the more clearly the beauty of His gospel will shine through us to others.

Life, the Way It’s Supposed to Be

Several years ago, I received an unforgettable email from a young woman in her early thirties, a single mom I had known since she was a little girl. The subject line said simply, “Happy Mother’s Day.”

Intrigued, I opened it and read on.

Her note brought back some memories that, while fuzzy in my mind, were still fresh in hers. She referenced a handful of activities I'd planned for her and several of her middle-school friends and a brief conversation here and there as she grew up—nothing particularly significant in my mind. But God had used these periodic connecting points as an enduring means of grace and encouragement in her life.

Her closing paragraph touched me deeply:

Although you may not have biological children here on earth, your spiritual motherhood and its impact have been among the greatest blessings in my life. Thank you for being a shining example of Christ's likeness. Happy Mother's Day!

The note was signed, "From one of your many spiritual children." It doesn't get much better than that.

I assure you that I fall far short of being the "shining example of Christ's likeness" I long to be. But how I thank God for the way He uses our lives and efforts—imperfect as they are—to accomplish His purposes here on earth.

My response to my young friend captures the essence of this book, as well as my heart for you—whatever your season of life—as we begin this journey together:

I was pretty close to the age you are now when some of what you describe took place. I had no idea then how those simple things would impact the lives of you girls. I just wanted to love and encourage you. And God in His grace caused those seeds to take root and produce sweet fruit.

Now God has given you a precious daughter to disciple, and undoubtedly has put others in your

sphere of influence. I pray your life will be a fragrance of Christ to them and that one day you will have the joy of receiving a note that will bless you as much as your note has blessed me.

Love,
Nancy

And so the race goes on. Each of us supporting others and encouraging them to press on. One generation passing the baton to the next, preserving and inspiring godliness and gospel witness. And, in the process, the beauty of Jesus shines forth and His kingdom is advanced in our world.

This is a joy you can experience. It's not about having a big platform or an official teaching role (though God may entrust one or both to you). More than that, it's about living the life He has made you for and called you to, right where you are.

Older women modeling holiness, obedience, and love, and investing intentionally in the lives of younger women.

Younger women seeking and receiving, with humility and gratitude, the blessings given to them from seasoned women, only to pass the treasure on to others down the line.

Women of all ages—growing ever more beautiful as the gospel of Christ adorns our lives.

Adorning that gospel by the way we live.

And doing it all, step by step, together—the Titus 2 way.



Making It Personal

Older women

1. Can you think of two or three younger women with whom you could share your life and experience—as Vonette Bright did for me? Who are they? How might you go about approaching them?
2. Older women are called to pass the baton to younger women. What have you learned or experienced that you would like to pass to the next generation?

Younger women

1. Does the note I received from my young friend inspire you to send a similar one to a spiritual mother in your life? If so, what specific things can you express gratitude for?
2. Name an older woman who speaks wisdom, vision, and faith into your life—as Vonette Bright did for me. If you don't have anyone like that currently, ask the Lord to direct you to a woman you could approach about investing in your life.

To get the most out of this book, invite a group of women—younger and older—to read through it together. You'll find a group discussion guide and lots of helpful companion resources at adornedbook.com. Connect there with other women about how to apply the Titus 2 calling in your life and relationships.