

# Unfading Beauty

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[ 0 : 00 ] Before we come to just try to understand this part of God's words shall we pray together. Lord God, we want to hear from you. Human words are not what is going to feed our souls.

! Human words cannot impart life. Yours can.! So Father, I pray as we come to this tricky part of your word that you would speak and that the words that are from you would be remembered and would be like seeds going into our hearts, springing up, bearing fruit, producing beauty. Father, in the things that are just from me that I say that are just my words, I pray that they would be forgotten. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Beauty is power. Would you agree with that? I think what we see, we turn on the telly or TikTok or whatever it is, and you see the catwalks and the Hollywood galas.

I think what we see going on there is a power play. There are men there of course, but especially women in those situations are dressing, or should that be undressing, in order to exercise power and influence.

[ 1 : 37 ] And that, over the last however many years, has trickled down and we see that play out, not just on catwalks and in galas anymore. We see it play out in other places too, right?

And I think that is bad for all of us. Because it teaches men to objectify women and read them superficially. And it teaches women that to be beautiful and therefore to be powerful, in order to do that, you have to look like a bulging stick, right?

Who wears maybe more hairspray and makeup than you do clothes. Or you have to dress like a man. Here's a quote from a lady who's a feminist, not a believer as far as I know.

She's called Naomi Wolf. A culture fixated on female thinness is not an obsession with beauty, but is an obsession with obedience. Isn't that interesting?

It's about obeying an image or an idea, submitting to it, if you like. Instead of freeing women, what does that do?

[ 2 : 48 ] It makes them slaves again. Submitting to this one picture of what it means to be beautiful. And I think men and women bear responsibility for that.

Because in some ways, as a society, we've forced women into that power play by restricting them elsewhere. And of course, we're all responsible for allowing the beauty industry, because that's what it is, to develop the way that it has developed.

We don't need to talk about eating disorders or fashion bullying or male superficiality to know that, do we? It's not good for us. And it totally tallies with what the Bible says.

If you go to the beginning, you read about the fall. Genesis chapter 3, verse 16. Here's what impact that has on the relationship between men and women. To the woman, he says, Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.

Do you see what's happened to healthy relationships? Women want to control, have power over the men, and men dominate or subjugate women. That's the result.

[ 3 : 58 ] So what do we do? There's a better way we read in the Bible, based on everybody submitting to the Lord Jesus instead. Grab your Bible. Chapter 2, verse 25.

Just one verse back from where our reading started. It says here, For you were like sheep going astray. That's all of us. But now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

All submitting to the Lord Jesus. Do you see? And Peter teaches that how men and women live at home is an extension of our submission to Jesus.

And he's really saying, I want you to live together in a way that reflects both biological reality, the real differences between men and women, and eternal destiny.

Hold on to that. You might remember we spoke a few weeks ago about God's design for men and women in church. And now we're going to think about those principles and how they work out a little

bit within families.

[ 5 : 00 ] So it is part of our One Peter series, but it's also kind of part three of this series. And before we go any further, I just want to acknowledge how difficult and painful a subject this is for so many people who have been married and are now divorced, or who would love to be married but aren't, and those who have suffered a real abuse of the things we're going to read about, or other kinds of abuse in their relationships.

That applies to men and women, doesn't it? Nonetheless, we believe this is wonderful truth from the Saviour who died for us. Even if it's being delivered by me and I happen to be a man, these are the maker's words, aren't they?

And believe it or not, what they seek to do, these words, is to elevate women and to educate men. Which is exactly what we think is needed generally today, isn't it?

You don't believe me? I hope you will by the end. So first of all, Peter speaks to wives who are married to a man who doesn't follow Christ.

Or to a man who at least is not acting like it, right? Let's just stop and say that's all men at some point in time. And so straight off, the Bible is realistic, isn't it, about life.

[ 6 : 24 ] It isn't all perfect marriage and 2.4 children. Otherwise, Peter wouldn't be speaking into this situation, would he? Let's just note that living like that is challenging.

It is hard. Sometimes it can feel heartbreaking. So how do you win when you're in that situation? I don't mean, wives, how do you beat him? Or how do you get him to do what you want? That's not what I mean. I mean, how can you turn this situation into something that is a win for both of you? I'll give you a clue. I'll give you a clue. It's not by turning into a catwalk goddess. And it's also not by bashing him over the head with a Bible.

Let's read together. Wives, in the same way, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that if any of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

[ 7 : 31 ] Peter says you win by submitting to your husband as part of a life submitted to Jesus. That's what living with purity and reverence means.

It means being holy and fearing the Lord. Some of you might be thinking, well, what does he mean by submission? What does that mean? Well, here's some words from a female Christian commentator, Claire Smith.

What submission looks like in a marriage, I think, looks different in each marriage. We're all different. Marriages go through different stages. They mature. They have different challenges. But broadly speaking, a wife expresses her submission by respecting her husband and welcoming and accepting and honouring his distinctive responsibility to lead and care for her and for the family. What does that look like in practice? Well, I can't read anywhere in scripture that that means that the husband makes all the decisions. It doesn't mean there's no discussion.

[ 8 : 35 ] As far as I can tell, it doesn't even mean that the husband leads in all areas. I think it means that working together in love, men and women chart a course together.

And the husband has overall responsibility for that course before God. Now, he may well agree with his wife that she's going to lead in some areas of their joint life together.

I don't know. Finances, the household, the diary, managing the cars, you know, whatever it is. But overall, he remains responsible. I think it means that in the context of everybody submitting to everybody else, because Ephesians is clear about that, if you discuss and you don't agree, and there is a tie, he has a casting vote.

But, with that vote comes the obligation to cast that vote in the interests of all of his family, putting his own interests below theirs, just as Jesus did for us.

Now, that's how it's supposed to work. But it doesn't always, does it? And so, Peter also is very clear about limits, I think. First of all, this is voluntary.

[ 9 : 51 ] That's why it's addressed to wives. Verse 1, wives, in the same way, submit yourselves. Who is in control of this? The wife is.

Nowhere in scripture is the husband entitled to enforce this. Nowhere. I think it is worth noting as well that this is temporary.

Peter's been talking about submission in other ways. Submission to government. Submission to a master, maybe an employer, someone like that. In the same way, this kind of submission is temporary too.

Because remember, there is no marriage in heaven. And I think we need to note that this is limited as well. Lordship is ultimately in the hands of the Lord Jesus.

Not in the hands of a husband. And your submission is based on living that life of purity and reverence, isn't it? Which means that if your husband expects you to do something that Jesus forbids, or if he forbids you to do something that Jesus commands, your higher loyalty to that higher lordship kicks in.

[11:00] And you say, no, I'm sorry. I can't do that. And for Christians, the context is servant-hearted, sacrificial leadership by the husband.

It's a two-way street. If he does not treat you as a co-heir to eternal life, as Peter is about to say, if for instance, he abuses you in some way, there is no question of ongoing submission.

So the message is fairly simple. Within those limits, it is right for wives to voluntarily submit to their husband's leadership and live a life of love and purity.

That is the way to win. So we need to ask, wives, do we see purity as an objective in our lives?

Something that is dear to us and precious? Because it's powerful. There's also freedom in this.

Somebody I spoke to said this, well, if my husband's willing to do his bit, sacrificing his interests, maybe even his life, to protect and provide for me, well, then I can go along with him.

[12:14] Why? It's a safety that comes from knowing that somebody is willing to sacrifice for you.

And I think it's right to ask on Remembrance Day then, of the men here, are you willing to answer that call?

If it came in the way that it came before in the war, would you answer? Maybe even more important, are you answering it daily in your life together?

This is also freeing because Peter is actually not saying that you need to keep talking to your husband about the gospel if he doesn't believe. And he's not saying you need to keep correcting your husband if he's not listening to the Lord Jesus when he says he is.

In fact, he says don't because it won't help. Here's the standard, I think, in the words of another woman. If he's not a Christian, don't give him a reason to resent that you are.

[13:23] And Peter says there is huge spiritual power in that move to keep accepting his leadership and living a life which speaks of Jesus because you can win him without words. That's not powerlessness, is it?

If the God who rules the universe can use that to change his eternal destiny, that is amazingly powerful. What about when a man can't lead or won't lead or for women who have no husband at this time?

Well, like we've already seen, the Bible speaks to the world as it is. God knows that that's the case.

If you were to flick over to 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 14.

Paul is speaking there to younger women who have been widowed. But I think we can transfer that command also to women who have not been married. And he says there, he gives it in the form of a command, manage your homes and give the enemy no opportunity for slander.

Paul is saying if you are without a man in that respect. He can't lead, he won't lead, there is no man. You have a mandate to manage your home.

[14:49] Do that well. Give the enemy no opportunity. Lead in those circumstances. Because Jesus doesn't want this to be a source of guilt for those of us who can't do it.

It's about grace. Because Jesus leads you ultimately, doesn't he? Perhaps you're married to a Christian woman and you're not a Christian.

Have you asked yourself, why is my wife like this? Why is she generally principled and respectful and peaceable and agreeable and involved in doing good things?

It's because she's following the Lord Jesus. It's because the love of Christ is moving her. Isn't it about time that you recognised that that's what's going on?

Isn't it about time that you became not just a life partner for her, but an eternal life kind of partner? Jesus is waiting to welcome you, if that's you.

[15:59] There are no conditions, there are no qualifications. There is forgiveness and new life, if you will trust him. I was thinking about preparing this message this week and I came across these.

Can you see what the theme is? In all of these different things? It's an eternal beauty. That's what all of these ants are sort of picking up on, chasing after.

Now you may be thinking, well I know what he's going to say. I know what he's going to say. He says, that's a pipe dream, don't chase it. I'm not going to say that. Because there is such a thing as

eternal beauty.

And what's more, it's available to all women, whether you're married, unmarried, divorced, single, young, old. Whether you fit the stereotype of beautiful or not, it is available to you.

Let's read together. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

[ 17 : 21 ] That is the beauty that never fades. The inner beauty of a gentle spirit set at rest by God. See, the origin of your beauty is not out here in these things.

It is in the inner self. And what that really means, the sense of the Greek, is the whole of you built from inside out. Did you get that?

Did you get that? And that beauty is unfading, which means it is like the life and the seed and the word and the inheritance that Peter has already been speaking about.

Isn't it? Imperishable. Unbreakable. And Jesus gives that to any woman who follows him. Isn't that amazing? For every girl and woman, along with the gift of eternal life, is the gift of eternal beauty. So if you have ever felt unlovely, then I want you to hear this. God sets in you eternal beauty. Even if the world ignores it, and no man in your life ever notices it, he sees it in you always.

[ 18 : 42 ] So don't plaster a mask over yourself. Instead, let your transformed inner self shine out. Have you ever been by the sea when it's flat, calm?

This word that we've got here, rather it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.

Quiet doesn't mean silent, you know, never heard. It means serene, calm, unruffled, like an ocean as still as a mill pond.

It just makes you feel peaceful just by looking at it. And just think of the depths and the power that lie underneath that calm surface.

The serenity of that kind has real power, doesn't it? It far outlasts the latest eyeliner or the little black dress that refreshes people. It moves people that kind of calmness and serenity, doesn't it?

[ 19 : 54 ] You heard of the butterfly effect theory? The theory goes like this. A butterfly flaps its wings somewhere in the world, and somewhere completely different in the world, chaos results.

I'm not going to try and scientifically defend that. But I think this beauty is a kind of a reverse butterfly effect. A butterfly lands, and you see its serene beauty as it opens its wings to the sun. And somewhere else in the world, whether it's home or somewhere in the invisible realm, God's shalom results. God's shalom results. Peace, wholeness, order spreads.

I think we just need to note here, just in case there's confusion, that Peter is not forbidding jewellery and beautiful clothes and nice hair. He just says, that shouldn't be the source of your beauty.

Your inner person should be the source of your beauty. And actually, that's better. That's better.

That's freeing, isn't it? Because if the source of our beauty is inside, then how we dress and do our hair and what makeup we put on and what jewellery we put on can be an individual, beautiful expression of that inside, unique beauty.

[ 21 : 20 ] Instead of having to conform to someone else's idea of what is fashionable and beautiful, it frees us to think, what shows my inner person?

The beauty of my inner being. I think if there's one thing to remember from what we talk about today, I'd love it to be this, that that beauty belongs to every woman who follows Jesus as your birthright.

It is freely offered. Jesus cherishes that beauty in you and he will preserve it forever. That's what we want to invest in. Let's keep reading.

For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her Lord.

You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. There's a lot going on there, isn't there? But really simply what Peter says is, this is the way for women who trust God's promise.

[ 22 : 34 ] And it always has been. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on Sarah, but I think it's probably worth mentioning that if you read Genesis 18, which this alludes to, you will see that she is a pretty feisty character.

Who handles her own household decisively. You know the story. Yet she is commended for her submission. If you've got questions about that, please just come or anything else, please just come and ask me.

But the point is, how can she do that? She can do that because her hope is in God. Her security is there.

Not in her controlling her own life. Or her husband doing a perfect job. But in knowing that she has a Lord in heaven. And that makes her fearless.

Not powerless. Fearless. She doesn't give way to fear. Her hope is in God. She is a promised life. Just like Peter says in verse 7.

[ 23 : 39 ] The thing about Sarah is, well into her 80s, the Bible tells us, she was known as one of the most beautiful women of the time. In fact, so much so that Abraham worries that she'll get taken away from him by some other man.

If wives act like Sarah, they will be like her. Heirs to the promise of life. Unfadingly beautiful. When I think about Sarah, with a little help, I now also think about this lady.

That's my grandmother. She is receiving an award from the Yad Vashem Foundation. I think she's radiant in that photo.

But of course, if you know anything about the Yad Vashem Foundation, you'll know that they give awards to those who have risked their lives to protect Jewish people.

Especially during the First and Second World Wars. And my grandmother was somebody who did that. If we respect God most of all, if our hope is in Him, if we know we are of great worth to Him, that He bestows on us eternal beauty, then what is there to be afraid of, sisters?

[ 25 : 04 ] Not old age. Not old age. Not the Nazis. What does the serene ocean fear, after all?

Nothing. God sets the boundaries of the ocean, and she keeps to them. But under that gentleness and calmness, there are unplumbable depths and vast reserves of power.

She has nothing to fear, except the voice of the Lord Jesus when He says, be still. Be still. And lastly, verse 7.

Husbands, in the same way, be understanding as you live with your wives, and honour them as the weaker partner, and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

So, men, two things to do, and two reasons. And that little phrase, in the same way, means that this is part of your submission to the Lord Jesus.

[ 26 : 11 ] That's what it's referring back to. So, the first thing to do is, know and understand your wives. That's what be considerate means in the NIV.

Men, you have to understand her. To do that, you have to study the word, and you have to study your wife. My advice?

Don't stop at primary school. Okay? Way past PhD, the standard is that you are to be the world's leading single expert on the specialist subject of this woman.

If she has strengths or weaknesses, you know them. If she's carrying a burden, that's your business. If she has a gift, you're the first one to spot it. If she has a goal and a passion, you're there.

Understand her. And if you do that properly, you'll learn a good deal about yourself along the way. And then, we have a way to go.

[ 27 : 15 ] Right? I know I do. And you need to do that. You need to understand her in order to be able to do the next thing. And that is to honour her.

Some translations have respect. It's too weak. Honour. Show her honour. That means a delighted, demonstrative treasuring of the woman who will one day inherit the earth with you.

That goes way beyond wishing my amazing wife a happy birthday on Facebook, doesn't it?

Everyone should know that you hold this woman in the highest esteem. Lead your kids, if you have them, in celebrating her. Make sure that your wider family, including hers, knows that she deserves the deepest respect.

Just a shot in the dark here, speaking from my own experience. If you consistently book out your Saturdays to go golfing with the boys, without talking to her first, are you honouring her?

[ 28 : 29 ] Now, Peter says, honour her as the weaker partner. I think we need to be really clear here that the only way the Bible talks about women being weaker is in a physical sense.

And that is what the Greek means here. Okay? So, no nonsense about spiritual weakness, emotional instability or hormonal irrationality. None of that. She may be physically weaker, generally speaking.

She is fit to be a queen in eternity. Why? Well, we're already starting to talk about it, aren't we? Peter is saying, she is a partner with you.

She is a co-heir to the gracious gift of life. She is equal to you, in other words. Jesus died for this woman.

She didn't need to earn his respect. She doesn't need to earn yours. You should treat her with honour accordingly, in light of biological reality and eternal destiny.

[ 29 : 40 ] And if you fail to do this, there is a warning, isn't there? So that nothing will hinder your prayers. Peter says, quite remarkably, I think, that your life-giving connection with your maker will be obstructed.

If you do not do this. If you are not living with your wife in an understanding way, you will not have an effective prayer life, friend. It's a bit like when our kids come and say to us, Dad, please can I have a sweet?

And I answer, go and make it right with your brother or sister first. God doesn't say that because he doesn't love us, but because he does.

And he also loves your sister. I think it goes further. Husbands, if you use your body or your position to oppress or dishonour or abuse your wife, God is against you.

That is a bad place to be. The Bible condemns it. And it will not be tolerated or covered up in this church.

[ 30 : 51 ] Let that be said. So if, men, we are in a spiritual slump, as we have all been, this is good to think about, isn't it?

But even better, men, is to look to Jesus in this great responsibility. To look to Jesus, the perfect bridegroom, who has already walked this path without making any mistakes.

And to put our trust in him and to ask his spirit to live and move through us, to help us be like this.

Can you see that Jesus elevates women as equal heirs and having eternal beauty?

Can you see that he wants men to educate themselves about their wives and honour them? Can

you see that he wants us to live together in a way that reflects biological reality and eternal destiny?

Both of those paths are Christ-like, cross-shaped paths, aren't they? Submission, sacrifice. And Peter tells us this because it will bring the subtle suffering that he has been busy with in this whole letter.

[ 32 : 09 ] It will, if we live this way. Because this is not popular out there, is it? And he also tells us, because being like this will help us endure that subtle suffering.

Because it will strengthen our relationships. It will make our homes strong and safe places for souls that Jesus loves. So much more that could be said.

I want to end with just saying this. If you've got fears about it. If you've got fears about it. Men, women. And can I encourage you to be like Sarah.

Put your hope in God. Submit to him first of all. Because this is the way for us. Amen. Let me pray.

Lord, again we just repeat this simple and humble request. Words that are from you, our King, our Lord. Please help us to receive them and live by them.

[ 33 : 12 ] For they are words of eternal life. Words that are not from you. Please may they be forgotten. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.