

Modesty & Beauty

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[0 : 00] We started a brand new series here in 1 Timothy just two weeks ago. And if you missed the past two weeks, I'd encourage you, go to the church website and you can listen to those first two messages in the series.

You can find it on Google or the addresses on the front cover of the bulletin. We've already covered the background of this letter. And we looked at the introduction and the first instructions in verses 1 to 8.

Then last Sunday we jumped ahead to chapter 2. And we did the first eight verses there. And we heard Paul urge Timothy to implement the prime directive in the church.

And what's the prime directive? Was anybody here? Pray, pray, pray, and give thanks for all people.

Then we heard how Paul urged the men specifically to come together and pray without anger, without disputing.

[1 : 03] And I encouraged our men about those things last Sunday. Well, now we're going to move into the Lord's instructions for women in the church.

And we're looking at verses 9 and 10 of chapter 2 today. Let me just read these verses for us. This is Paul writing to Timothy. Therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

I also want the women to dress modestly with decency and propriety, adorning themselves not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

So Jesus has specific instructions here for the men. He also has specific instructions for the women. But I want to start this morning by acknowledging that there's a sense in which both instructions to men and women apply to both men and women.

Paul says, I want the men everywhere to pray. Does he want the women to pray too? Of course. Paul highlights that the men should pray without anger or disputing.

[2 : 28] Do women ever have issues with anger or get in arguments? Of course you do. But, as I said last week, some of these things might be more of an issue for men.

Neglecting prayer. Anger. Disputing. I look out my back window and I see my girls playing family in the backyard. I look out my front window and I see Caleb and Josh wrestling in the grass.

We tend to be a little more vigorous and abrasive. So now as we come to these instructions for women in verses 9 and 10, yes, it is mainly aimed at women. But the general principle applies to men as well.

Yes, us men sometimes are tempted to dress immodestly. To show off new or expensive clothes or accessories. But generally it is going to be more of an issue for the women than the men.

So what's the instruction given here to the women? In verse 9, Paul says, So our faith in Jesus affects every area of our lives.

[3 : 58] Yes, even down to how we dress and the clothes that we wear. There are certain ways of dressing that simply do not fit with our faith in Christ.

And I want us first to notice here that Christ's instructions for how we should physically clothe ourselves only last for one verse. This isn't a 10-page list.

And the instructions given here revolve really around two moral issues. So it's not a highly restricted dress code that's intended to take away all of our freedoms. We aren't told what color socks to wear.

We aren't told that we must, for women, must always wear dresses. Or that on certain days of the week we must wear this or that. Or that women must wear burqas.

Rather, Christ gives us a couple principles and a couple examples to steer us away from that way of dressing that is inappropriate for God's people. And the first principle that he gives us here about how we should physically clothe ourselves is this principle of modesty.

[5 : 08] I want the women to dress modestly, with decency, and propriety. Paul uses three words here. Modesty, decency, and propriety.

And it's kind of hard to define these words without each other. I tried looking them up in the dictionary and they all just had the other word there. But when it comes right down to it, their meaning is very similar.

Especially in the context of clothing and how we dress. Basically, the idea is that we dress appropriately. Respectably. Suitably.

Decency carries that same idea, but also that idea of being adequately covered. Or not exposed. And with propriety means with reasonableness.

Good judgment. Discretion. Moderation. Now part of the trouble here is that how we dress is very much related to current culture. And we have to be careful here because we can go too far in either direction.

[6 : 09] We can make the cultural context too much of a factor here. Or we can make it not enough of a factor here. In how we interpret and apply these words. For example, some people will just let these words go in one ear and out the other.

And say, well, that was way back then in Ephesus. Times have changed. How could any of this possibly have any application or relevance to us today? Elaborate braided hairstyles may have been immodest back then, but today, that's totally all right.

Culturally, it's all right, isn't it? Or we can kind of go down the other side and we could say that, well, the culture isn't really the issue. It's what does it say?

This is immodest. No matter what the cultural context is. But then how do we apply this in cultures today around the world when we see such different standards of dress for women?

So it's not totally irrelevant. As we'll see in a moment, modesty and clothing transcends culture in some ways. But it's also bound by culture in some ways.

[7 : 22] Let's start by realizing that this wasn't just a problem for the women in the church at Ephesus. How do we know that? Well, we see this in verses 8 and 9.

8 is the instructions for men. That's the first sentence. 9 is the instructions for women. And back in the original language, in the original way this was written, they actually share the same verb and they're connected by that word also or likewise, depending on your translation.

So these instructions are meant to be together. I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. Likewise, the women to dress modestly with decency and propriety.

So Paul himself lets us know that this is an issue that transcends local culture. Just as the men were to pray everywhere, in every church.

The women too, to dress modestly, everywhere, in every church. Whether that's in the Jewish areas or the Roman cultures or the Greek cultures.

[8 : 34] So there is a bit of a transculturalness to this that we need to see here. It's not just the women in Ephesus who struggled with this.

But next, let's see how this issue was affected by the culture of the first century. Back in those days, it was the days of the Roman Empire. And there was something of a dress code back then.

Now it wasn't necessarily written down in law or any policies. But there was this shared cultural understanding of what was appropriate for women to wear and what was inappropriate.

They had women who worked as prostitutes back then. And they would dress in a certain way in order to attract men and to make money.

And so if you were a married woman, you didn't dress like that. That was considered inappropriate. It was considered dishonoring to your husband and to your family.

[9 : 36] And so by what you wore, you could either broadcast this message as a woman. Either I'm taken, I'm married, I'm unavailable. Or you could broadcast the opposite.

I'm available. I'm interested in some kind of a relationship. Whether romantic or sexual. Not only that, but fashion was a thing back then too.

The wealthy, courtesan women in the highest levels of the Roman Empire, they seemed to set the trend for women all around. And so as we read of the kind of the styles back then, we hear

mentioned in the passage, elaborate braided hairstyles.

This was really a fashion trend started by the wealthy, courtesan women. They would spend hours having their servants do up their hair with these elaborate braids and kind of piling it all on top of their heads with gold and pearls and beads, worked into the design.

And then young girls and women all throughout the empire would see them and they think, wow, that looks beautiful. And they would begin to imitate and follow along with that.

[10:53] Surprisingly, when we think about that cultural context, it's actually not all that different from today. We have women today who work in the sex industry and who dress a certain way in order to attract and allure the attention of men.

And most women today are quite aware of the difference between business casual and the outfit for the bar or clubbing. We also have wealthy celebrities today spending thousands of dollars on fashion, styling, even cosmetic surgery, eager to show off the latest and the greatest.

And similarly, we have countless women who are watching, young girls who are watching and who are imitating. So what are the real problems here? Essentially, there are two.

The first is dressing to appeal in the sexual sense. That's kind of implied by the terms modestly, decency, and propriety.

And the second is dressing to show off. That's kind of comes to us in what Paul says, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes.

[12:16] So these are the two big ways, the two moral principles that kind of anchor his instructions here about modesty. One is more about sexual attraction. And the other is more about showing off through fashion and style.

But I would like to suggest that both of these really boil down to just one principle, one heart problem. And it's simply this.

Dressing to draw attention to myself. That's what a modest dress and indecent clothing and expensive clothes are about. I'm dressing in order to draw attention to myself.

I want people to notice me. I want people to like me. I want that guy to see me. I hope that he asks me out. I want my friends to compliment me and think I'm awesome.

I want them to be impressed when I walk through the door. I want them to ooh and ah over my new hairdo or my nails or my new piece of brand name clothing. I want them to see how well I'm doing financially with my latest purchase.

[13:27] Whether clothing or accessory or jewelry. The problem with all of this is that the focus is on me.

It's all about me. Me, me. It's on me being loved by others. Me being admired by others. Me being praised by others. Having the attention of others.

And it really is a selfish and self-centered attitude of the heart. Now again, I want to point out this isn't just a problem for women.

Do you know who else had this problem of dressing in order to get others to notice them? The Pharisees. The religious leaders of the Jews.

Jesus himself speaking about them said, Everything they do is done for people to see. They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long.

[14:32] And this wasn't just a problem in the first century. Way back long ago, hundreds of years before all this, The prophet Isaiah rebuked the women of Jerusalem for their immodesty.

Isaiah chapter 3 verse 16. The Lord is speaking and he says, The women of Zion are haughty. Walking along with outstretched necks. Flirting with their eyes.

Strutting along with swaying hips. With ornaments jingling on their ankles. He goes on, In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery. The bangles and the headbands and the crescent necklaces. And the earrings and bracelets and veils and headaddresses and anklets and sashes. The perfume bottles and charms. The signet rings. The nose rings. The fine robes.

The capes. The cloaks. The purses and mirrors. And the linen garments and tiaras and shawls. It's quite the list that he used back then to describe all the different ways that the women were dressing seductively.

[15:35] Or dressing to show off and to impress. To get attention for themselves. And back then the Lord promised judgment. Because these women were wicked. And this way of dressing kind of fed into that and was part of that.

So it all boils down here. I'm suggesting, I'm submitting. When it comes to how we dress to a heart issue. Am I dressing to draw attention to myself?

The Bible's words for this is vanity. It means being self-absorbed. Really desiring the admiration and appreciation of others.

It means being excessively concerned with your own physical appearance. Being a show off. About something that in the grand scheme of life isn't even really that important.

This is the heart behind a modest dress. Am I dressing to draw attention to myself? This is a thing that doesn't fit with faith in the Lord Jesus.

[16:41] It's a thing that in the household of God. In the church. We should turn away from. We should reject. Now. I want to briefly acknowledge that. Dressing in this way isn't always a heart issue.

In some cases. It's kind of done in ignorance. Without really thinking too much about it. Girls go shopping with their moms.

And what happens when the vast majority of the clothes on the shelf are immodest? Because that's the trend of the day. You get these really low cut tops. Or you get these really high cut skirts.

Or shorts. We can think of culture. And its effect on us. Like a fish swimming in the water. All the fish really knows about.

Is the water that it's swimming in. It doesn't really know too much about the world outside the water. And I think sometimes it's like that for girls and for young women. If the world all around us is all dressing this way.

[17:47] And just acts like it's normal. We see it on TV. We see it in the movies. We see it online. We see it at school. We don't know anything else. Without even realizing it.

We just accept. Yes. This is the way to dress. This is normal. This is beautiful. This is what's appropriate. And so we see these kind of ridiculous things.

Like children wearing bikinis at the swimming pool. There's not a heart issue there, obviously. It's an innocent thing. It's more of an ignorance.

Maybe an imitation thing. I want to be like mom. They don't realize yet why it's immodest. But as we grow and develop. And puberty happens.

And interest in the opposite sex awakens. Suddenly we become more aware of what dressing in these ways does for us. That attention that we start to get.

[18:44] And we lose that ignorance. And that innocence. And so as parents. And even just as people in general. We need to be sensitive to this. In some cases.

It's not that the person is just hungry for attention. Sometimes we just get into following the trend of the day. Without thinking too much about it. Or sometimes.

Women may choose to wear modest clothes. Simply because they don't want to stand out. Like a sore thumb. Because if that's the trend. That's the style. And everybody else is dressed like this. I'm going to feel really weird.

If I'm wearing something totally different. Something that's out of style. My friends will make fun of me. So yes. There is a heart issue here.

That we have to watch out for. But also an ignorance. And a naivety that can be part of it. Especially for girls or young ladies. As the temptation is there just to follow the crowd.

[19:41] So here are some questions. To ask yourself. As you get dressed in the morning. And look in the mirror. And do all the stuff that you do. It's different for men than for women.

Here's some questions. Is this modest? Is this appropriate? Is this respectable? Is it honorable? Am I looking for attention from others? With this outfit? This makeup? These accessories? Or jewelry?

Am I dressing like this to impress someone? And if so, who is it? What part of my body does this outfit highlight?

And draw people's eyes to? The most? And is it one of the parts that they shouldn't be looking at? You guys know the parts I'm talking about.

[20:45] Now we might wonder here. You know, is Jesus saying that we should never braid our hair?

Or have elaborate hairstyles? Or even wear expensive clothes? Or have any jewelry? And I think the answer to that question is no. These things listed are an example of the immodesty common in the day.

Paul's just kind of painting a picture of how they would dress when they come to church. Or just even on an ordinary day. But even Jesus acknowledged that it was appropriate to dress up for occasions in one of his parables.

In Matthew chapter 22, Jesus tells a parable about a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. And there was this man who slips in unnoticed without wedding clothes.

And when the king finds him at the banquet, the king throws him out because he's not dressed appropriately for the occasion. Now yes, there is a deeper meaning to this parable.

[21 : 51] It's about the kingdom of God. But the illustration that holds that meaning up is still true. Jesus was implicitly acknowledging that, yes, it would be inappropriate to go to a wedding banquet without wearing clothes suitable for the occasion.

And I think there's a principle here. That we should dress to suit the occasion. We should dress in a way that honors the person that's being celebrated.

And yes, wedding suits and gowns and dresses are expensive. But that expense is not paid just to draw attention to myself.

It's paid to honor the one being celebrated and remembered that day. Maybe you've been in that position where you didn't have anything that fit anymore.

Or something happened to your old wedding attire. But then somebody gets married and you've got to go get a new suit. You wouldn't have got it otherwise, maybe. But you go get it because that's how you honor the occasion and the people that are being celebrated that day.

[23 : 02] So we should dress up to honor the occasion or the person. Some occasions are very special. Some are once in a lifetime. That's a different heart than dressing, though, just to draw attention to yourself.

And it still needs to be governed by decency and modesty. Now, I haven't been to a wedding in a while. But when I was younger, I was always surprised by how some of my peers, young Christian women, I mean, they dress modestly every day.

Everything was all covered. But then comes the wedding day and the dress is so revealing. Just showing it all up here or totally all bare right down the back.

I couldn't believe it. I was like, man, it's like they're half naked in front of all these people. Like, awkward for me. Or at the pool with bikinis.

You know, if it's immodest to wear just a bra and panties out in public, how's that any different than wearing a bikini at the public swimming pool?

[24 : 10] It's the same amount of coverage. Basically the same thing. So yes, we dress up to suit the occasion. We dress up to show honor to others.

Yet also keeping in mind decency, modesty. Let's talk for a moment about how we should dress for church on Sundays. I know that this conversation has bubbled around the surface here in our church on occasion.

Should we dress up? Or should we just come as we are? Because that's who we are. And that's more authentic. I think, again, it all comes back to this heart question of why am I dressing up for church?

If it's just to draw attention to yourself or because others expect it, then it's vanity. It's just like the women portrayed here in this passage.

But if you're dressing up to honor the occasion, to honor the Lord who we are gathered to worship, then by all means, dress nicer for his sake.

[25 : 21] Probably don't dress it up so much that you end up drawing a lot of attention to yourself. I mean, do you want people singing and praising God during worship? Or do you want them kind of distracted by your bridesmaid's gown or your tuxedo and your shiny shoes?

That being said, there are times and situations where we've got to choose between coming to worship or not coming to worship.

And we don't want to make that choice based on whether we can get home and get the clothes. So if you've got a shift after this at the health center or you're working on duty or whatever, coming off a shift here in coveralls, I think the Lord would rather you be here and be worshipping.

Because worship is really all about the heart and not about the outward appearance. It's just a way that we can honor the Lord when we gather. Now I want to take a few minutes to talk practically about what immodest dress looks like.

And then we're going to look at how Christ wants us to dress. Now I hemmed and hawed over this back and forth all week long, whether to make a list like this. But you know, I think in the church we need to spell it out clearly.

[26 : 40] If we don't, then we leave it up to the world. We leave it up to culture around us to define modesty. And as we're seeing more and more, our culture is going away from it.

So don't take this as a religious to-do list. Just take it as a practical guide for how a person might dress immodestly. And also this list is for us who are followers of Jesus.

I hope that, I want you to know that if you're visiting or new here, just checking things out, if you're dressed like this, you don't need to run out the door here. We're not going to hold a check stop at the back door on the way out.

We're here to learn. We're here to see what Christ is calling us to as his followers. And so I hope this list is helpful. Maybe we can have some conversations about it.

If there's some pushback, bring it on. Let's talk about it. Let's have the conversation. It's important.

So here goes. Immodest dress is clothing that doesn't completely cover private parts.

[27 : 52] Clothing that can be seen to fit very tightly around the private areas. The areas listed on screen. Clothing that is see-through or sheer, which allows people to see your undergarments or lack thereof.

Clothing that covers but is still designed intentionally to get people's attention to private parts.

Clothing that reveals midriff.

Now I know there might be some pushback on that. I'm going to tell you though. If you Google outfits for the bar, you'll find a lot that show midriff. And if you Google business casual, you'll find none.

Why is that? I think it's because we generally have this sense of what is acceptable out in the public, in the workplace, in the daytime.

Clothing that has windows or cutouts near private parts or along the sides of the body. Clothing that reveals the inner thighs.

[29 : 01] Now I'm not going to give an exact skirt or shorts length above the knee, but I'm going to say when in doubt, probably go longer. Because we see the direction that our culture is moving, right? Again, Google business casual for women and you won't find short skirts, really short skirts, really short shorts.

Another thing that's not inherently immodest, but just sometimes something to watch out for, is clothing that is unsuitable for the activity. Maybe it reveals private areas when you're bending over or sitting down.

When we gather like this, we're almost in like a family gathering as a church. I mean, there's hustle and bustle. Things are going on. There's stuff all over the floor that the kids have dropped. We're shuffling furniture sometimes.

We're doing different things. We need clothing that is functionally modest. Whereas there's some occasions where you can kind of get away with clothing that is less functionally modest.

On the other side of things, on the showy side of things, immodest dress includes brand name clothing or accessories that are very expensive. I'm thinking coach purses.

[30 : 19] Maybe you women know what those are all about. \$500 clutch, \$1,000 handbag, \$2,200 leather jacket. And that's the only brand name I know.

You guys can probably think of more. Those highfalutin brands. At this point, it's not about quality. It's about getting attention. It's about showing off because you've got the brand name swag.

But hey, if you find one of these pieces of clothing or these purses for almost nothing at Value Village, go for it. Don't worry about it.

God knows your heart. Ostentatious jewelry. Really large earrings, rings, necklaces, brooches. Probably not for most people in our generation, but over-the-top fascinators. You ever see those hats that all the feathers coming out and it's like, woo!

[31 : 17] And for many young people today, their phones have almost become like a fashion accessory. People showing off their expensive new iPhone 14, 15, whatever it is.

And then when people stop caring about it, oh, I've got to go get another case that matches my favorite outfit so that I can show how it matches with my clothes. And just spending all this money just for a show.

It's modest. All right, well, that's the end of the list. We've thoroughly unpacked and applied that first part about how to dress modestly with decency and propriety.

But now let's hear the second half of what Jesus wants us to do. I also want the women to dress modestly with decency and propriety, adorning themselves not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

Adorn yourselves with good deeds. Make yourselves beautiful, not with all these outward things, but with good deeds. The kind of actions and works that are fitting for a woman who claims to worship God, says Jesus through Paul.

[32 : 39] Again, we get this idea here that there is a way of making ourselves beautiful that is fitting with our faith in God. And there's a way of making ourselves beautiful that's not fitting with our faith in him.

And so I want to say to you women, do not concern yourself too much with body beautification, fashion, clothing, accessories. Make yourself beautiful by doing the things that godly women do. Quite literally, through good works. In other words, you know what's truly beautiful? It's when you see another person in need, and you give of your time, your resources, your energy to help that person and meet that need.

That's what good works are all about. Acts of love. Acts of encouragement. Things done to meet the needs of others.

And now be careful. Paul's not saying, well, go around and do a bunch of good works to get others to notice you. Of course not. That's what Jesus scolded the Pharisees for doing.

[33 : 55] He means do these good works out of that genuine love in your heart for the people around you, the people in need. Again, the heart is the key. True beauty.

The greatest beauty that a woman can have has to do with who she is on the inside. Not the outside. Jesus said it this way through the Apostle Peter.

He said, your beauty should not come from outward adornment. He's talking to wives specifically. Such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine 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. Now here in this context, Peter is talking specifically about wives submitting to husbands, and we're going to get to that in time, not today.

So that's why he highlights these particular qualities. Gentleness and a quiet spirit. But there are other inward character qualities that make a woman beautiful. The fruits of the spirit is a good place to look for a quick list.

[35 : 06] Love. Joy. Patience. kindness. Faithfulness. Self-control.

And we could add to that list. Wisdom. Humility. Deep trust or faith in God. Reverence.

Respect. Compassion. Generosity. These are all inward things that we get through our devotion to God, through our relationship with him.

And these are the things that make a man or a woman beautiful. Radiant. And so I want to encourage you women. Pursue the inward beauty.

Pursue that inward beauty. Go after it. Let it flow out of you in your actions. I think we all know the answer, but let me just ask it anyway. Women, what's more attractive?

[36 : 07] That muscular guy who's ripped with that charming face, who only cares about himself and lives to please himself, whose mouth is foul and who never keeps his word.

Or a somewhat overweight, ordinary looking guy who isn't perfect, but loves God and genuinely cares about other people and treats them with kindness and respect and honor.

Solomon said it this way, Proverbs 11, 22. Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.

So you can be outwardly beautiful, but altogether quite unattractive. Without the godly character and wisdom that only comes through your relationship with Jesus, you could have the perfect body, the perfect features, but they would actually be spoiled by your lack of character.

Proverbs chapter 31 is one of the best chapters in the Bible dealing with this. The whole chapter is wonderful. It speaks of all the good deeds that a wife might do to bring blessing and benefit to her children, to her husband, to the poor and the needy.

[37 : 29] And at the end of the chapter it says this, Proverbs 31, verse 30. Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

One day, if God lets us live that long, we'll all be old, wrinkled, baggy, and saggy. Outward beauty is fleeting. It doesn't last.

But that inward beauty of godly character is unfading. And it leads us to do all kinds of beautiful things that will leave a truly beautiful legacy in the world around us.

Pop culture blogs and websites like to keep records of ridiculous things like the top ten most beautiful women of all time. Maybe you've come across an article or two like that.

And the list, of course, will be all these celebrities, models, wealthy people. But I can tell you right now, much more beautiful than any from those lists are women like Corrie Ten Boom, whose faith led her to put her life on the line, to hide Jews, to save their lives during World War II.

[38 : 51] Or little Gladys Aylward who packed her bag and went all by herself to China to share Jesus with these people who didn't know Christ even though everybody laughed at her and said, what can you possibly do?

Or Elizabeth Elliot who followed her husband to reach out to a tribe that killed him and then went one step further and moved into the tribe and shared Jesus with them.

I'm going to bet that most of you wouldn't even recognize them if you saw their photo on the screen. And yet from the things that they did, those real acts of courageous love, they are among the most beautiful women our world has ever seen.

And so I want to encourage you, be like them. Let who you are on the inside be your highest priority. Go after God. Love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Live for him. Obey him. And do the good works that he's put before you to do. And you will be outstandingly beautiful. We've got to tune out what the world is telling us about beauty.

[40 : 05] Most of it's wrong. Don't listen to Disney. Don't listen to Mattel. Don't look at Vanity Fair or Vogue or the Kardashians or those trashy men's magazines that sell indecent pictures of women for profit.

Don't take the fashion advice from the YouTubers or the TikTokers who are just trying to get more subscribers for their channel. As Christians in the household of God, we need to listen to the Lord Jesus.

We need to take our advice, our instruction from him. He is the one who loves his bride so much that he died for us to make us, to cleanse us, to wash us, and to present us to himself as a radiant church.

If we focus on ourselves, we'll wind up feeling empty and disappointed. But if we focus on him, he will make us shine with a beauty that's like no other.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Father in heaven, I thank you for these words that you've given us.

[41 : 17] And I know I'm aware that for some here today, they may be hard words to hear, but they're your words. And I pray that you would press them into our hearts and in all the right places and that we would grow, that we would see how we can continue to walk in this world holy, distinct, set apart, holding up the light of Jesus.

May the world around us see the difference and come to put their trust in you. We ask this for Jesus' sake. Amen.