

Dress without stress - An interview with style coach Hilary Nicholls

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Preacher: Hilary Nicholls

[0 : 0 0] Brilliant. Well, thank you so much, Hilary. Wasn't that amazing? We've already done a round of applause for the models, but thank you so much. So many tips. Starting to wonder whether I've worn the right dress or not for tonight, but I'll spend some time on my own later having a think about that.

But we'd love to spend a few minutes now, if that's okay, chatting to you about your faith and how that interacts with fashion. And I don't know if it's just me, and please forgive me for this question, but I think it's a question that's got to be asked. Are people ever surprised to discover that you are a Christian? And again, forgive me, but not just a Christian, but a vicar's wife and interested in fashion. Is that surprising for people?

Yeah, I do get quite strong reactions about that, I have to say. Often more from Christians, actually, who are surprised that somebody who is a Christian and quite a committed Christian is involved in the world of fashion.

But yes, I think a lot of people think that if you're a Christian, or if you've, yeah, a lot of people would think that actually what you're like on the inside is more important than what you're wearing on the outside.

So I think for some people, it does feel a bit weird. And so is there a conflict? You know, does God disapprove of you being interested in fashion? Is there a conflict on this kind of having too much focus on what you look like? You said that what's inside matters more.

[1 : 3 1] These are all things that, yeah, I can totally kind of, I'm longing to know the answer. Yeah, I think it is a really good question. It's something I've grappled with as well, when I thought about setting up my business.

And the first thing I want to say is that I think there is no conflict, because God is actually the, as Christians, we believe that the God of the Bible, as he describes himself, has been involved in all of creation from the beginning of time.

And down to the finest detail, as we look at nature, of the colors that we see in the flowers that come each of the seasons, in the birds, in butterflies.

There's just so much, like, intense and exquisite detail that he didn't need to bother with. Like, why bother? And as we look around this room, like, everybody is slightly different.

And he could have made us all the same, like carbon copies. He made humans. He made leopards or whatever. You know, we could all just look very similar. I do understand that leopards look different from each other, by the way.

[2 : 3 4] But, yeah, I think just looking around this room, you know, there's just such an array of shapes and colors and detail. And that is something that, as Christians, we believe that God has given.

He's the designer of designers, if you like. And so it would be also a disservice to him and somehow not fitting if we were to all do that kind of Christian stereotype of all dressing the same in brown sacks and Jesus sandals or something.

Like, yeah, I feel like that's a bit of a mismatch with who God is as I've come to know him and discover him as I've read the Bible. And that's such a positive message to hear, isn't it?

And as we look around this lovely room and see all these wonderful ladies and all this color, it's just such an encouragement to hear, isn't it? That God is the designer of designers. Yeah.

Yeah. Absolutely. And, yeah, and that he cares about each one of us and went to the effort of making each of us individuals with different, you know, not just different looks but different personalities, different strengths and weaknesses as well.

[3 : 40] That we can celebrate that. And as Christians, we believe that God talks to us through the Bible. Can you tell us a little bit more about what the Bible says about how we relate to God?

You know, you said that he created us. Yeah. Can you tell us a little bit more? Yeah. So that creation, Christians believe that the fact that we're created and that God creates us in his image and actually in the record of creation, it says that humans were the pinnacle of his creation, the thing that brought him the most pleasure.

So that is why Christians believe that everybody has a dignity, anybody, whatever their stage of life, whatever their mental state is, whatever their physical state is, everybody has a dignity that is given by God because everybody is made.

And somehow each of us in his image. And somehow each of us are representing him as we live our daily lives. And so that gives us a great value. And on the other side, we all know that we're not perfect and we are far different to who God is in his perfection.

And even our vague attempts at being creative are nothing compared to him. And so we are created beings. And that gives us a humility and needs to make us aware that we are limited beings and we are created beings rather than the creator itself.

[5 : 03] But we can enjoy creativity as we mirror something of God's character. And that's really encouraging to hear as well, isn't it? But I guess for some of us it can still be really hard, can't it?

Because we like to take care of how we look and I know certainly I find this hard. But there's this real temptation, isn't there, to compare ourselves to other people either favorably and kind of feel good about yourself that day or unfavorably and kind of feel that you need to be shy in a certain social setting.

She's not got the right thing on. And so, yeah, how can we delight in our differences as women? I think it's something that I always struggled with as a teenager.

You know, I was always looking at other people and thinking, oh, you know, how can they look so good and they look so good in this place. And I think for me actually becoming a Christian really, really changed that because I realized that actually, yeah, God does look at our hearts ultimately.

And so he's made all these lovely things for us to visually enjoy. But he sees us down at our deepest level. And, you know, like when I go to a client and I do a wardrobe makeover and they get really embarrassed because there's the dirty knickers that they forgot to put away or whatever it is.

[6 : 16] But, you know, that can be a kind of slightly a shaming moment or something that you wish that, you know, the other person hadn't seen or whatever. But with God, he sees everything.

And I'm sure if we all think about our behavior and the things that we think about, the things that we worry about, the things that we feel towards other people, which are often unspoken in our heads, but God sees all that.

We know that we are far from perfect and that we need something to be different about who we are. And that we can't do that in our own strength.

And so God has given us the message of Christianity is that God has dealt with that problem. And he's given us, if you like, the most extreme makeover that is possible, where he clothes us with the goodness that he has.

And takes our mess and our rejection of him and our thinking that we can do things on our own, thinking that we can do things without him and forgives us.

[7 : 18] And that is grace, what we call grace. And that is a really refreshing thing. And I think for many people, religion, they think that Christianity is a religion where you've got to do stuff and earn God's favor.

And the message of Christianity is that actually it's all been done for us. And that is a really freeing thing. And so going back to what you were saying about our security and our tendency to compare. And if we know that we don't deserve what God's given us, we are weak and created beings who need his help.

But he does also give us this dignity and we can enjoy who he's made us as individuals. That can take some of the pressure off trying to be like somebody else or wanting somebody else's life.

And there are different ways that we kind of treat God wrongly as well in relation to how we dress. We can get our value or our security from our beauty or our clothing.

And all those things are so temporary. They're not going to last. And people's opinions of us will come and go. Our nice figures might come and go. Our gray hair will come for sure.

[8 : 28] And our clothes, even our finest clothes, can get moth eaten and be destroyed, sadly. Our cashmere jumpers. So none of that's going to last. So having something that feels secure, that's not dependent on me and not dependent on the powers that be in the world, is really reassuring, I think.

Does that make sense? Yeah, no, no. I think that makes sense. Perfect sense. And it's such wonderful news, isn't it? But I'd love to pick up on something you said about contentment. Because I think I hear so many of my friends talking about a kind of a quest for contentment, a quest for happiness.

There's a zillion self-help books on that type of thing. So it can be really hard. So I'd love to hear a little bit more about contentment and what it means for you and how it works.

And particularly, I guess, when circumstances are difficult or in the circumstances that God has put you in. Yeah, it's a really important question, isn't it? I mean, every day we can wake up and feel despairing about our lives or feeling hopeful.

And having that security that I believe being Christian gives me in a way that nothing else can is so reassuring. So if you think about the things that we might chase after to bring us that security, for example, our health or, as I said, like the nicest clothes or a perfect family or a perfect garden, all those things, even if we do get to where we want to be, they're all going to disappear and they're not going to last.

[9 : 56] And so putting our trust and our hope in something that is secure, not dependent on us. And God promises us that he doesn't just look after us in this life, but that he gives us a hope, a certain hope for the future where all the aging and the dodgy bits of our bodies will all be made perfect.

I'm looking forward to that. And there won't be any aging and there won't be any more death or sadness or sickness. And that is a wonderful thing to hold on to. And I really, you know, if you have a Christian friend, do talk to them about it.

I know a lot of people just think, oh, that's just pie in the sky when you die. Like, how can you really believe that? Like, is it just something that's kind of like a crutch to get you through this life? But if you look at the life of Jesus, there's so much evidence in the Bible for who he was, for who he is, that he was God and that he was able to reverse things like sickness.

That he was able to reverse death even. And then his resurrection proved that ultimately. And yeah, and his death on the cross really shows us that he loves each of us 100% and he is for us.

And so having that as a kind of grounding, I guess, means that when the storms of life come and they have come and gone for us. We've had a really hard time recently with my younger son.

[11 : 11] And having a hope and a security and something that I can hold on to that isn't dependent on who the politicians are in the world at the moment or what's happening with the financial crisis.

And having something that is steady and sure. And God has kept the promises, all the promises that he's made up until now he's kept. So I have a confidence that he will keep those for the future.

And that includes him working out his perfect plans for us. And yeah, and I think it turns the idea of contentment being about what can I get out of life and what can make me feel good to, okay, I've been given all this amazing kind of position in life that I don't deserve.

I have a security and I have a hope that God has shown me. And so how can I live that out and think about how I serve other people with that? And so it takes the focus more off me, hopefully.

And so, you know, I think there has been a change in me. You know, I don't go into a room so much now thinking, oh, you know, what do I look like compared to everybody else? It's more like, oh, who are the people here who God's given me today to encourage or to, yeah, to be kind to you?

[12 : 27] Or what can I do for the people who God's put around me? Because everybody is made in his image and there's something to celebrate in everybody. Not just their looks, but who they are and getting to know people behind their looks as well.

And can you just say a little bit more? Thank you. That is also encouraging. But I'd love to hear a little bit more. I'm sure lots of us here have families. And Amelia was talking about her day-to-day life, ferrying children around on a bike.

And I often see her ferrying children around on a bike. Just particularly kind of when the rubber hits the road, as a wife and a mother, how does your faith help you?

You've said a little bit, but maybe. Yeah, I think having a God who I feel like I actually have a relationship with makes a massive difference. So he's not just a power that's out there who I know created the world.

But because of what he's done for me and knowing that he's died on the cross and that he's taken all that rubbish stuff. And he doesn't see me just in that way anymore.

[13 : 31] It means that I can have him like a father, really. So I pray to him every day. I have a conversation with him when things are difficult.

When I'm struggling with decisions or frustrated about something, I know that he's there and is always ready to listen to our prayers. When I'm with other people, thinking about that person and thinking about how I might be able to encourage them or help them, whatever stage of life they're at or whatever things they're going through.

In my marriage, it means that that's the most important thing, is our relationship with God first. And our children find it a bit weird because we say we love God first and then after that we love each other and then they come next.

And they're like, what? On a good day. That's rude. But yeah, our ultimate desire for our children as well is that they will know God for themselves and find a contentment in him that the world just doesn't seem to offer.

And leaves us constantly striving for things where we try and put things in the place of God. And where we look to the things that he's created rather than to him. We will constantly be striving for a satisfaction that those things can't bring.

[14 : 50] But I do believe that God does give us that. I'm not saying it's plain sailing. Like, you know, I have problems and there are things that are difficult from day to day. But there is a deep-seated contentment and hope and a freedom about the past, mistakes that I've made in the past.

You know, in the present, that confidence and hope. And then, yeah, looking to the future. Looking forward to an eternity with a God who will see even more of his amazing creation in a way that we can't even begin to imagine yet.

Because heaven is, I don't know if you've ever read bits of the Bible that describe heaven, but it's so colorful. And there's going to be jewels and it's going to be, yeah, just absolutely stunning.

And we'll have amazing houses to live in, a place that God says he's prepared for us. And it's, yeah, so sometimes, like, the disconnect, I guess, I feel. Like, as we're sitting here tonight in this random hall talking about clothes.

It's like, they're quite big things to be talking about. But the God of the Bible has proved himself to have kept his promises. He promised he would come in a human being so that he could connect with our world and show us what it was like to have God on earth.

[16 : 08] And he showed us that he was alongside us. He is alongside us in suffering as well because he came and suffered to the point of death for us. A huge sacrifice that demonstrates his love.

Thank you so much. That's such wonderful news, isn't it? And I, yeah, I know. For so many of us, if we've lived on this planet for any time at all, we know that the things that we all strive after often don't provide the satisfaction that we hope they will.

So how wonderful to hear about faith that does and that is lasting and secure. So bringing it back to fashion then. So we've talked about how much of an impact your faith has across all parts of your life, your marriage, your children.

But I guess, you know, your work is fashion. And because you've got faith, does that mean that you don't face any of the temptations that the rest of us face to kind of compare yourself to other people or to...

Sorry, I feel like that's a very personal question. But you've been very honest with us so far, so thank you. But how does that play out for you? Yeah, no, I definitely wouldn't say I'm a finished work on that one.

[17 : 15] And there are often temptations. I mean, I'm a sucker for a new season of clothing in the shops. But managing that and kind of, you know, even being able to pray to God about a choice, about whether I should spend my money on this particular dress or whatever.

Do I really need that? And I think it's particularly helpful what Amelia's been saying about thinking about caring for creation as well. Well, this world is limited and we are here to look after it. And so, yeah, just trying to think about the choices I make in those terms as well means that, you know, I'm constantly feeling guilty that I've made mistakes and that I've put my clothes through the washing machine and the tumble dryer again.

But, you know, you can't... It's impossible in this life to do everything perfectly. And we'll always be living with a sense of things are not as we would love them to be.

And that can happen relationally. It can happen in our work. It can happen with our health in so many ways. But, yeah, knowing that there is a friend alongside us in God who sees those things, who cares about those things, who we can talk to about those things, who's got a plan to use those things to change us.

And that's... So, yeah, the encouraging thing about being Christian is that it's not just you become a Christian and that's that, that God is changing us and helping us to be more like him.

[18 : 40] And you might be thinking, that's a really slow process in you, Hilary. But, yeah. He promises that he's doing that. And I trust that process, even though sometimes, you know, I still feel like I take a few backward steps.

Well, thank you so, so much. And I guess not being stressed about fashion and just enjoying it gives us more time to do other things as well. Yeah. It's a win-win.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.