

# How to Resist Being Exploited by Culture

Much has been said the last two weeks in the blogosphere about provocatively dressed young women. The most popular posts have included harsh words to young women. It's all had me thinking: Just how would I encourage my daughter (if I had one) on the issue of body image and sexual exploitation?

It's not too hard to imagine what to say, because it doesn't feel that long ago I was that tween, awkwardly trying to figure out how to think about my body, how to dress and how to deal with male attention, whether it was positive attention, negative attention or simply being ignored altogether. What would I now say to my younger self?

Honestly, I don't think it's much different that the lectures I give myself as a 43-year-old wife and mom. It should go something like this, I think, and it needs much less discussion of dress and a lot more discussion of relationship with God:

Young Friend,

God made you in His image to reflect something about Himself. Stop and think about that for a moment. He made *you* as part of His plan before time began. He has set His affection on you, which means He loves you, and not in a cheesy, superficial way.

The Bible says that He has pursued you through the ages, and He has a good plan for your life, which includes the dignity of being a part of His epic true story planned before He even created the earth. *You* are part of His story. He's the hero, and you are His Bride.

When you feel insignificant at school or whatever social setting you find yourself, understand that the group of people making you feel insignificant is not the final word on your

worth. The way they hurt you may feel monumental in that moment, but it is really just a small blip on the overall social radar of life, let alone the social radar of eternity. You have great, eternal value in God's eyes, and don't let anyone on earth cause you to think that you don't.

As you navigate life, you, like all normal people, will need affirmation. You need someone to say, "Good job," or, "Well done." You need someone to notice you.

Please know that the desire to be known and affirmed is not a bad one. And it is not a desire that you are likely to outgrow. However, if you look to the wrong people to affirm you, you are going to set yourself up for serious pain in life.

Know that you are precious to God. He gave His own life for you. *He* affirms you, and *He* knows you. Others may make you feel good at times. Others may respond to you in ways that make you feel known. But earthly affirmation is always, at best, fleeting. Guard yourself from looking to others on earth to make you feel good about yourself. Your needs (and mine!) are way too deep for any human to satisfy.

Don't take on your shoulders the responsibility for other people's sin. You do your part right as much as you can, but don't let others project onto you that it is your fault that they sinned. Honestly, even if you do royally mess up, it is still their responsibility whether they sin in response or not.

But do take responsibility for your own sin. When you sin, you don't need to beat yourself up. Always remember that, if you are a believer, God sees you wearing Christ's robe of righteousness. He doesn't shame you, and He never condemns you. But He does call you to confess your sin and repent. And when you are safe in Him, confident of His love for you, you can do this. You can face your sins head-on, admit them, receive forgiveness and then do what you can to repair with those you hurt. Do that regularly, confident in Christ that you are covered even after serious mistakes.

If you have questions about specific things in your life, find an older believing woman that you respect. Don't trust your deepest concerns to just anyone! Look for someone who is compassionate, who treats those smaller or younger than herself with dignity and care.

Look for someone who is safe, whom you rarely hear gossip about others. Because if they gossip about others, they'll gossip about you. And look for someone who is wise. Have you heard her say things to others that seemed consistent with your understanding of Jesus?

Does she know her Bible without lording it over those around her? If you hear her shame or condemn others, don't seek her out, for she'll likely shame you. But if you hear her offer words of grace to those who are hurting, that may be a good person in whom to confide and seek advice.

Most of all, don't ever let yourself believe the lie that prayer and Bible study are meaningless duties for a Christian. No! Jesus is real, and He's there. He speaks through His Word. He will give you grace in your struggles when you come to Him in prayer and Bible study. Whatever you do, read the Word. The Gospels and the Psalms are always good places to go to learn more about our loving God whom you can trust with your life.

Much love from someone who believes the best for you.

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup's** blog, . Wendy has authored three books including By His Wounds You are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*