

What the Well-Dressed Christian Wears

by Mary Lowman



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A Bible Study

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The Christian Working Woman
A Ministry for Christians in the Workplace

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God's word is relevant to every issue we face.

I believe this with all my heart.

I've written this study to help all of us prove this true in our everyday lives!

WELCOME!

I'm delighted you've chosen to study *What the Well-Dressed Christian Wears*. Obviously, there's more to this study than just dressing for success. The well-dressed Christian has a wardrobe that is special indeed, a designer wardrobe, which can make all of us the best-dressed people in the world. I pray this study will help many of you learn how to wear these unique garments.

Many years ago God taught me this lesson of dressing the inner person as I struggled with some things about me I knew needed changing. I still practice this principle regularly, because it has helped me so much. Many others have told me they've been able to use it very effectively in their lives, too.

I trust you will find this course practical, encouraging, and life-changing. I'd really love to hear from you after you've completed the study. Let me know what you think about it and how God has used it in your life.

Joyfully,

Mary Lowman

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Study Objective and Format

Before you jump into the study, I think it will be helpful to give you a brief explanation of how I've designed the study. The course is very interactive—it is intended to get you involved as much as possible. If you wanted to read a book, you would have bought a book instead of this study. So, I assume you want something that helps you discover things for yourself and come to some conclusions on your own. Therefore, this study will ask you to look up Scripture and paraphrase it, define terms, analyze attitudes, etc.

All quotations and passages are quoted from NIV. While it's possible to use other translations, you'll find it easier to follow if you use the NIV.

Another characteristic of this study is it asks probing questions about you and gives you opportunities to make decisions. The fourth chapter of Hebrews tells us the Word of God is powerful, piercing to the dividing of joints and marrow, soul and spirit. The Word of God is intended to probe into our hearts, motives, lifestyles, and help us see what needs changing or eliminating. The probing questions are there to facilitate that process.

There's a possibility they may irritate you at times. They certainly have gotten under my skin frequently! But I hope you'll see the benefit of those probing questions, and use them as an aid in getting to know God better.

One of my priorities is always to be practical, so I try to avoid generalizations and make things as specific as possible. In my own life, if things remain very general...then, generally, not much happens! It's when God gets very specific with me that I start to see exactly what I'm supposed to do and how I'm supposed to change.

The format gives you space to answer questions and write in your thoughts. I encourage you to do this, even though it may not seem necessary. I have learned putting things in writing really crystalizes those ideas in my mind, especially when God is dealing with me. It will also help you to concentrate better.

However, what you do is between you and God, so if you skip some of the questions, that's no problem, at least not with me! If you think some part doesn't apply to you, then of course you're free to skip it and go to the next.

And if you think I must have known you personally when I wrote some of this, then we're probably very much alike! This study comes from how God has dealt, and continues to deal, with me. Believe me when I tell you—I'm just a woman who is in the process of becoming all God wants me to be, and I'm sharing some of that process with you in hopes that God can use it effectively in your life.

Mary Lowman

Lesson 1 – Do Clothes Make the Person?

Introduction

Clothes are an important part of our lives. From early ages we become very conscious of our clothes. Those of us with daughters can easily recall how they develop a great interest in their clothes at a very early age. Ever try to get a four-year-old girl to wear a dress she didn't like? Very hard to do. Or, for a real challenge, try a fourteen-year-old. Absolutely impossible! And others tell me sons are extremely clothes conscious, too. We form opinions about our clothes very early in life, and we treat clothes as more than just coverings for our body.

Why do you think clothes are very important to most of us?

To some extent our very identity seems to be wrapped up in the clothes we wear.

Have you ever thought about how much time you spend on your clothes? You have to shop for them, decide which ones to wear, clean them, mend them, and match them.

Just for fun, let's try to estimate how much time we spend on our clothes in an average day. Think about your own life, and try to objectively determine how much time each week you spend:

Dressing: ____ hours

Washing/Mending Clothes: ____ hours

Shopping for Clothes(purchase or no purchase): ____ hours

Total Hours per Week: ____

Divided by 7 = ____ avg. hrs per day

Does that number surprise you? Is it more or less than you thought?

Now, you are undoubtedly thinking, “What is the purpose of all this? I thought this was a Bible study!”

Well, hang in there with me. Eventually you'll see where I'm going with this calculation you've just made. And it does make the point that we are very involved in dressing our outer person.

Do Clothes Make the Person?

For those of us in the working world, our clothes take on added importance. Do you think the way we dress has an impact on our success in the working world?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how important do you think they are?

- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Minimally important

How can the way we dress impact the impression we make on others, our relationships, our success?

Should a Christian Be Clothes Conscious?

Is it important for a Christian to look good—to be concerned about appearance?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Why or why not?

I sincerely believe it is important for Christians to be careful in their dress and in their appearance, so as not to bring any dishonor to the Lord. Sloppiness and dowdiness are never condoned in God's Word.

What are some benefits we can experience if we do give appropriate attention to the way we dress and make sure we look as good as we can?

When we feel confident about the way we look, we become less self-conscious. I've discovered when I leave the house in the morning feeling my hair, my outfit, and my overall appearance are close to optimum, then I can forget myself and how I look for the rest of the day. But if, on the other hand, I face a day feeling my dress is not proper or my hair is not becoming, then all day long I am thinking about myself, running into the ladies' room to try to improve my appearance, fussing with my clothes—in other words, self-absorbed. In that condition I cannot be very effective at reaching out to other people and being concerned about their lives, because I'm too much into myself.

For Christians in the working world, I believe it is important we dress in good taste and good fashion. Clothes do contribute to others' impressions of us, and we should not ignore that fact. We carry the reputation of Jesus Christ with us, and it's important that our personal appearance is never a hindrance to anyone.

Should Christians dress differently in any way? Explain.

What Does the Bible Have to Say About Our Appearance?

Read: 1 Samuel 16:7 and Matthew 6:28-33

What is important to God?

We know clothes do not make a person. Lasting worth and purpose in life only come as we establish a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. We know God does not look on outward appearances; he looks at our hearts.

God does not condemn us for enjoying pretty clothes and nice things. In 1 Timothy 6:17 we see another clear principle for us to follow as we consider what our attitude toward these temporary things should be:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

God has given us everything to enjoy—that includes clothes. Our responsibility is to be certain we do not fix our hope or our central focus on these uncertain, earthly things.

Read 1 Peter 3:3-4 and paraphrase what you think it means:

Peter is directing this specifically to women. It is interesting to note that women were as much concerned with clothes and looks then as they are now. Does Peter admonish them not to adorn the external? Is he forbidding them to try new hairstyles or wear nice clothes and jewelry?

OYes ONo

What he is saying is to get your *priorities* in line.

I get the feeling that the ladies in Peter's day had the same problem many of us have when it comes to clothes. Our natural tendency to dress nicely can easily get out of line, and those clothes can begin to take an undue place of importance and priority in our lives and in our

thinking. Though men are not exempt from this problem, women are more susceptible to this unbalanced view of clothes, and we must be very careful to avoid this pitfall.

We can easily fall prey to the idea that our clothes make us more important or of more value. Clothes can start to become substitutes for the really important things in our lives.

What are some dangers of focusing on our outer clothes too much?

Have you ever allowed clothes to be more important to you than they should be?

☐Yes ☐No ☐At times

If not clothes, have there ever been other things or people in your life you looked to for fulfillment or prestige instead of looking to the Lord? Can you identify them?

I can remember when I looked to clothes to meet my emotional needs. I'm sure you know, without my telling you, it did not work. The emotional needs I was trying to meet through my clothes were only met when, after many years, I truly relinquished control of my life to my Lord. Then he began to change my emotions and desires, and he met those needs.

Gradually, I noticed my intense desire to buy new clothes began to subside. It was not a conscious decision on my part at first. It was simply God working in me, convicting me, and showing me his priorities for my life. And as I continued to get to know him and focus my thinking on him, I no longer looked to clothes to meet my inner needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, are there any changes you need to make in the way you dress?

Do you think your appearance is a positive or negative input when people see you?

Do you have the right attitude toward your clothes?

What commitment do you need to make to God as a result of this discussion? I suggest you put it in writing and review it every day this week:

My commitment to God:

Memory Verse for the Week

Another good suggestion: Write this verse on a card and carry it with you this week. By reading it and reciting it every day, you'll have it memorized without trying!

Matthew 6:33: *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Lesson 2 – Our Special Wardrobe: Compassion and Kindness

Review

Can you recite Matthew 6:33?

Now, may I ask, have you thought differently about your clothes in the days since Lesson 1? If so, how?

Introduction

In Lesson 1 we discussed our outer wardrobe—those clothes we have in our closet which occupy a great deal of our time and interest. The basic tenet of our ministry here at The Christian Working Woman is that God's Word is relevant to every issue we face. Therefore, it is neither unbiblical nor inappropriate to spend some time thinking about any area in our lives which is important to us, and certainly clothes are important.

Isn't it great that God cares about the smallest details in our lives—even our clothes!

Our Special Wardrobe

However, there is a very special wardrobe for a Christian to wear, and we want to look at that wardrobe in detail. We should spend far more time acquiring and wearing these “clothes” than any outer garments. This wardrobe will set us apart from other people and identify us as people who love and serve Jesus Christ.

The wardrobe I am referring to is totally within our reach, looks wonderful on all of us, and assures us of being very well-dressed. It is described in Colossians 3:12-15. Please open your Bible and read that passage slowly.

Isn't it interesting that Paul uses the illustration of putting on these clothes. Obviously, they are not outer garments, but these are the special garments intended by God for each of us to wear on the inner person, and we have a unique opportunity to be lights in our daily world by learning how to wear these beautiful clothes.

Now, here's that passage from Colossians 3. Underline each of the "garments" you see listed in this passage. I found ten; see how many you can identify?

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful (Colossians 3:12-15).

Because we'll be referring to this throughout the course, list below the garments you see in this passage:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

If we're expected to put on these clothes on our inner person, then we need to first understand exactly what they are. So, now we're going to take a close look at each of these special garments.

The Wardrobe Described

Compassion

The first garment is compassion. How would you define compassion?

The dictionary says it is a deep feeling of sharing the suffering of another. Another good word for it might be empathy. What is empathy?

I think of the old Native American proverb that says we should never criticize anyone else until we have walked one mile in his moccasins. That's what empathy is—putting yourself in the other person's shoes.

What would be some consequences of our attitudes and actions if we started wearing compassion—sincerely putting ourselves in the other person's shoes? How would wearing compassion and practicing empathy change our thoughts and actions?

For one thing, compassion keeps us from getting irritated with people when they don't do what we think they should do. When we wear compassion, we won't be so quick to condemn or judge. We'll give people room to make mistakes.

It seems to me that all too often I am quick to blame people and judge them without stopping to think of what they have endured or why they are the way they are. That's especially easy to do on our jobs. We judge our fellow workers without really understanding their suffering.

Would a person who regularly wore compassion be likely to pray more?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, why?

I believe compassion will cause your prayer list to get longer, because when we care about people, we pray for them. Also, a person who wants to become more compassionate can do so by praying for the people to whom they desire to show compassion. When we start praying for people, compassion becomes a natural outgrowth of our prayer life.

List some people in your world whom you would describe as going through some sort of suffering at this time—whether physical, mental, or emotional—people who need to be treated compassionately:

They're not hard to find, are they? There is suffering of all types around you, especially where you work.

Look at the names of suffering people you've just listed. Have you been compassionate toward them? Have you put yourself in their shoes and tried to understand them and care about them?

Now we need to think about what actions and attitudes on our part would indicate we're wearing compassion. List some specific evidences of compassion toward others:

Some evidences of compassion that come to my mind are listening to people, a luncheon invitation, offering to help someone in their job, refusing to gossip about people, showing patience toward others when they're difficult, not reacting to another's outbursts, etc. I'm sure you thought of many others.

Now, look at the list of people who need compassion. Then think of things we can do to show compassion. Can you identify some specific compassionate actions that would be helpful to them:

Name and Action

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Okay, here's where the rubber meets the road. Are you willing to show compassion toward those people? Are you willing to allow God to use you as an instrument of compassion? If so, will you right now make a covenant with the Lord to set your will to wear these specific compassionate clothes with these specific people? Will you covenant with the Lord to pray for them regularly? If so, why don't you write it here to drive the point home in your own mind:

I covenant with the Lord to show compassion to the people listed below and to pray for them regularly:

Names:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Signed _____

If you're serious about being God's best dressed person, if you want to really learn how to wear these garments on a regular basis, then it has to result in specific actions and changes. Compassion will look wonderful on you, but to wear it, you must set your will and have a plan to make it happen. I encourage you to make compassion a basic garment in your wardrobe.

Kindness

Kindness is the second garment in the closet of a well-dressed Christian. Now, you may think it's not necessary to define kindness—everybody knows what kindness is. But go through the exercise anyway; it may surprise you!

What are characteristics of a kind person?

Kindness does not mean mushiness or syrupy sweet behavior. But certainly it means being considerate of others and willing to let others have their way occasionally.

Have you been too busy to wear any kindness lately? Do you take it on and off depending on your mood or whom you're with?

Sometimes we are least kind to the people nearest to us. We seem to forget that kindness is important both on our jobs and at home. Kindness is especially important with those people we work with every day, our families, and those we live with. It seems we save our kind behavior for people we don't see very often, as though it were in short supply.

How would you grade yourself on being consistently kind to people in general?

☐ Good ☐ Average ☐ Not good enough

Are there some specific people you find it difficult to be kind to on a consistent basis?

If so, list their names below (start with one or two) and decide what you could do to be more kind to them in the future:

Name and Action

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

All of us can wear kindness if we want to. I hope you'll ask God to help you keep this lovely garment in your wardrobe.

Conclusion

It's important you not be discouraged if all this doesn't happen overnight or if you find it works well one day and not the next. Set your will to keep at it, spend much time in prayer about it, and review the commitments you've made through the week. You may be developing new spiritual muscles, and like anything else worthwhile, it takes a little time. Keep exercising!

I think we'll all benefit in our quest to wear these inner garments by memorizing the list. So, here they are listed below. Why not put them on a card, carry them with you this week, and let's memorize them.

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Compassion | 5. Patience | 9. Thankfulness |
| 2. Kindness | 6. Tolerance | 10. Love |
| 3. Humility | 7. Forgiveness | |
| 4. Gentleness | 8. Peace | |

Lesson 3 – Our Special Wardrobe: Humility, Gentleness, and Patience

Review

Can you recite Matthew 6:33?

Can you recite the list of garments for the inner person which we found in Colossians 3:12-15:

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Did you wear compassion more this week than usual? Explain how compassion was evident in your life this past week.

Was kindness a part of your wardrobe this week? What acts of kindness did you exhibit? Toward whom?

Was your sense of awareness heightened so that you were more conscious of wearing compassion and kindness?

Now let's look at some of the other garments for our inner selves.

Humility

Third in this special wardrobe is humility. Society often gives negative connotations to humility, as though it were an undesirable characteristic. It is often viewed as weakness or a “milquetoast” personality. Rarely do we think of humility as a necessity for getting to the top in the business world.

How would you describe someone you think of as humble?

If you asked a non-Christian, business-oriented person if he or she thought it was good to be humble, what kind of typical answer do you think you'd get?

One of the principles we need to have imbedded in our 21st Century minds is what people think about anything is not the most important thing. We need God's view, and frequently that will be at variance with the world's view.

Read the following verses to see God's view of the importance of being humble:

2 Chronicles 7:14

Psalms 25:9

Proverbs 16:19

Proverbs 29:23

Isaiah 57:15

Matthew 11:29

Matthew 18:2-4

Matthew 23:11-12

From these verses, identify some of the good things God has promised for a truly humble person:

What are specific characteristics of a truly humble person—the kind of humility God is seeking?

Now read Titus 3:2 in the NLT. What kind of humility are we supposed to show and to whom?

Titus 3:2 says to show _____ humility to _____.

We've just listed the characteristics of true humility. Well, if there is true humility, we have to surmise there can also be a humility which is not true.

Have you ever met someone who acted very humble but somehow you just didn't feel it was sincere? This is commonly thought of as false humility. What kinds of things might you see in a person who has false humility?

When we try to demonstrate our humility, then it's pretty certain we don't have it! Accepting compliments graciously is not a sign of pride or lack of humility. Saying degrading things about ourselves to others is not a sign of humility. Refusing to accept awards or recognition for what we've accomplished is not a sign of humility.

Do you find yourself displaying signs of false humility at times? For example, refusing to accept sincere compliments, degrading yourself in front of others, apologizing for things that don't require apologies, etc.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes

A humble person is humble, without trying to be humble. It is a natural outcome of learning who we are in comparison to who God is. When we are in a life-long process of constantly learning that everything we are and everything we do is because of who God is and what he has done for us and given to us, then humility becomes a natural characteristic.

Now, are you wearing true humility as much as you should?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you teachable—open to other ideas, suggestions and constructive criticism?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Always

Do you think of yourself as better than a lot of other people?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes

Read 1 Corinthians 4:6-7. What does this passage teach us about an attitude of thinking we're better than others?

Read 1 Peter 5:5-6. Peter says we are to humble ourselves. List some specific things we can do to humble ourselves:

You'll need the power of the Holy Spirit to make this a reality in your life. Will you pray right now and ask God to empower and help you wear humility?

Gentleness

And then we come to gentleness. I am always overwhelmed with the amazing gentleness of Jesus Christ. We need to wear his gentleness every day.

Read 1 Peter 3:3-4 again. Refer to page 5 in your workbook to see how we paraphrased this in Lesson 1.

Now read Matthew 11:28-30. How did Jesus describe himself?

The same phrase is used in both passages in the original. The “gentle and lowly” nature which Peter admonishes us to have in 1 Peter 3 are the same words Jesus used to describe his nature in Matthew 11. *No wonder it is precious in the sight of God!*

Look at the following passages to see what characterizes a gentle person and make a list of what you find:

Proverbs 15:1

Ephesians 4:2

James 3:17

Matthew 5:5

Galatians 6:1

2 Peter 3:15

2 Timothy 2:24-26

Is a gentle person one who never raises her voice, or never confronts other people, or never asserts their beliefs or convictions?

Jesus is always our supreme example, and we know he had a gentle nature. Look at these passages to see how that same nature responded to certain circumstances:

John 8:44

Luke 19:45-46

Matthew 23:27-28

Do you see a conflict with the way Jesus described himself in Matthew 11:28-30, and his strong words and actions we read in the passages above?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Jesus confronted people when appropriate, and he was very direct. However, he never asserted himself or confronted people in his own defense.

From the example Jesus gave us, what principles can we apply to our own lives as to when we should be confrontational and when we should not?

Now, look at the characteristics of a gentle person which you listed above. Which one(s) of those characteristics do you need to wear more consistently in order to be a truly gentle person? Make a list.

Will you covenant with God to make you aware of gentleness as you go through your day, to help you remember to wear this gentle spirit which is precious in his sight? You can be a gentle person if you set your will and ask the Holy Spirit to constantly remind you to be gentle.

Patience

The next garment we find in this wardrobe for the inner person is patience. The dictionary says patience is the capacity to calmly endure. I have to chuckle when I read that, because if anything is the opposite of what I am by nature, it is calm endurance. This is a really difficult garment for me to wear; it just never seems to fit—always a little too small.

And yet God put it on his list, and he didn't make any exceptions, not even for me. You know, I'm learning God can make this garment fit me—or rather, make me fit this garment—if I am willing to let him. I've asked him to help me put on patience, and since I've started asking, he has put me into situations that have taught me how to be patient. I'm learning—it fits better now than it did a year ago. If I can wear patience, so can you.

How would you classify yourself:

☐ Very patient ☐ Fairly patient ☐ Hardly ever patient

What are some signs that a person is impatient?

Which of these characteristics of an impatient person are you most often guilty of showing?

What do you think it will take to help you become as patient as you would like to be?

Rubber meets the road time again! Are you willing to let God work a miracle in your life and make you patient?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Be honest! If you're not ready at this point, don't fake it.

Conclusion

I just want to explain once again why I've designed this course with many opportunities for you to make some decisions and commitments. I'm sure you've noticed the questions are designed to help you bring out into the open the specific areas that need to have the searchlight of God's Word shine on them. It's simply because I know from my own life that if things remain very general, then, generally, not much happens! It's when God gets very specific with me that I start to see exactly what I'm supposed to do, how I'm supposed to change.

And when I make a definite commitment to the Lord and continually bring that issue to him in prayer and raise my own awareness level toward the issue, then things start to happen in my life. I figure I'm not that different from the rest of you. That's why I've designed my courses to help you make whatever commitment you see that needs to be made.

However, remember, what you do is between you and God, and no one else is looking over your shoulder! This course is designed to help you, not to lay guilt trips or make you feel defensive. Use what fits you and your situation. If you think some part doesn't apply to you, just skip it and go to the next. But please don't skip what the Holy Spirit is trying to say to you. My questions aren't terribly important, but his are. If he's using this study to uncover some things in your life, don't overlook them. You'll never know peace and joy until you allow the searchlight of God's Word to do its work in your heart.

Remember, before this ever was written in a study format, God spoke to my heart about me in each of these areas—and still today he deals with me in these areas. I haven't arrived. I'm on this journey with you!

Suggested Assignment

Again, I'd like to encourage you to memorize another Scripture verse. It's always good to put it on a card and take it with you, reading it every chance you get, and you'll have it memorized without trying.

Matthew 11:28: *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

Lesson 4 – Our Special Wardrobe: Tolerance, Forgiveness, & Peace

Review

Can you recite Matthew 11:28-29?

What about Matthew 6:33?

In our last lesson we focused on three of our inner garments: humility, gentleness, and patience.

Which one comes easiest for you?

Which one gives you the most trouble?

Which one showed the most improvement?

How did you do with wearing humility this past week?

Were you aware of your need to be humble?

Did you get rid of false humility you might have been wearing?

Why do you think a gentle and quiet spirit is precious to God, as we read in 1 Peter 3:3-4?

Can you think of a time last week when you were patient in an area it has been difficult for you to be patient before?

We'll now cover three more important garments in our special wardrobe.

Tolerance

The next garment is “bearing with one another”—or tolerance.

To get a very clear picture of what a tolerant person is like, answer the following questions:

True or False:

A tolerant person gets upset when people don't do exactly what he or she thinks they should do.

☐ True ☐ False

A tolerant person gets angry and upset when people make mistakes.

☐ True ☐ False

A tolerant person expects everyone to be exactly like him or her.

☐ True ☐ False

A tolerant person stops associating with people who aren't doing what they should do.

☐ True ☐ False

A tolerant person listens to others and tries to understand why they are the way they are.

☐ True ☐ False

A tolerant person gives people time to learn and grow.

☐ True ☐ False

Did any of those ring a bell with you? Which ones do you need to work on to be a tolerant person?

How often I expect others to track along with me—to march to the same tune my band is playing. And God has to remind me that he deals with each of us individually. Just because he is teaching me one lesson doesn't mean all my friends have to learn it simultaneously! Tolerance is the garment that allows us to “bear with” others, whatever their circumstance.

Tolerance doesn't mean compromise. We can show tolerance toward people without approving of their actions or lifestyles. It seems some Christians think they have to be visually and vocally intolerant in order to be true to God.

Let's put on tolerance! It will look good on all of us.

Forgiveness

The word forgiveness itself is beautiful. And, oh, what a wonderful garment to have and to wear. It brings so much happiness to others when we're able to forgive.

But the sad fact is many Christians go through life never learning the freedom of forgiveness. They harbor bitterness and pain, because they're not willing to forgive. Yet forgiveness should be a characteristic of the Christian life, one of the things which sets us apart from the rest of the world. Our ability and willingness to forgive should distinguish us. Yet, too often we're caught in the same desire for revenge and we're locked in a prison of unforgiveness.

The problem is forgiveness is not easy. In fact, it's one of the toughest things we have to do in this life. Forgiving someone who has wronged us goes against our nature and our instinct. You see, we all have a natural tendency to want revenge. Just to say, “I forgive you” seems to let the other person off the hook too easily. After all, they've made us suffer, so shouldn't they suffer, too?

If you've felt that way, or maybe you still do, you're not alone. I certainly have been there, and I understand the natural desire to get back at those who have done us harm.

However, if we follow those instincts, if we succumb to revenge and hatefulness as a way to deal with those who have wronged us, we discover it boomerangs on us. Our unforgiving spirit turns on us and causes us far more damage than anyone else. It doesn't solve anything, and it makes our own pain worse.

What happens to people who carry unforgiveness around with them for very long?

I think it will be very helpful for us to take a look at what Jesus had to say about forgiveness. If anyone has a right to talk about forgiveness, he does. He was mistreated constantly, with the final disgrace of being crucified unjustly. Yet even on the cross he was able to say, *Father, forgive them....* So, he's more than acquainted with forgiveness. Let's see what he says.

Read Matthew 6:14-15, and paraphrase what you think Jesus said and meant.

Every time I read these verses, I go back and re-read them to make sure I didn't misunderstand what Jesus said. Those words are very powerful.

But there's one other teaching Jesus gave on forgiveness which is even stronger than the one we just looked at. He used a parable to reinforce how important it is for us to forgive other people. It's found in Matthew 18:21-35. Please read that now slowly and carefully.

One explanation would be helpful. The debt the servant owed his master—10,000 talents—was an insurmountable sum, more than this servant could ever have repaid in three life times. Yet the debt owed him by his fellow-servant was minimal, about \$20.

What do you think is the analogy we are to draw from this parable to our lives today?

What do you think Jesus meant when he said, *"That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."* (Matthew 18:35)?

Let me ask you a question: How important is it to you to be forgiven freely by God? How much do you need his forgiveness? Can you run the risk of not being forgiven regularly by the Lord? Answer those questions explicitly.

Now, if you need God's forgiveness, what did Jesus say you must do to receive it?

And if you withhold forgiveness when you should forgive, what will God do to you?

Jesus' teaching on forgiveness is so strong that frankly, I don't understand the full implications. But this much I know—a person who refuses to forgive after they have been freely forgiven by God is asking for misery.

Here we go again with those probing questions:

Are you harboring an unforgiving attitude in your heart toward someone?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes

Have you tried to forgive them before but found it kept coming back to you? That's not unusual. Just forgive again—and again—as much as you need to.

Have you failed to forgive them because they haven't asked for forgiveness?

Have you not forgiven them because you feel they don't deserve it?

Remember the parable of the unforgiving servant; remember how much God has forgiven you.

It will be good for us to consider the wonderful benefits that will come to us when we learn to forgive—to wear forgiveness every day. Undoubtedly, you've experienced this at some point in your life. What are the benefits to you for forgiving others—besides the fact that God will then forgive you?

Now, can you ask God to help you wear forgiveness? If so, make a covenant with him now:

Lord, I covenant with you to forgive:

I may not feel like forgiving, Lord, but I do it by faith. I may have to come back again soon and forgive them all over again. But, by your grace and because you have forgiven me and because I want you to continue to forgive me, I do choose to forgive.

Signed _____

Peace

This is the next beautiful garment in God's wardrobe. The Bible talks about two types of peace. Compare these two passages and then describe these two types of peace.

Romans 5:1 (Peace with God) _____

Philippians 4:7 (Peace of God) _____

A truly peaceful person needs to wear both kinds, but one must precede the other. Which type of peace is necessary to have in order to have the other?

We must have peace _____ God before we can have the peace _____ God.

Is it possible to have the peace *of* God before you have peace *with* God?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Why?

Is it possible to have peace *with* God and not have the peace *of* God?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Explain:

Read the following verses about peace, and then answer the questions that follow.

John 14:27 John 16:33 Romans 8:6 Ephesians 2:14-17 Colossians 3:15

Does Jesus intend for his followers to be peaceful people?

☐ Yes ☐ No

When you wear peace, does that mean you never have any troubles?

☐ Yes ☐ No

According to Romans 8:6, what is the natural outcome of a mind controlled by:

The Spirit of God? _____

Sinful man? _____

Who is our peace? _____

What is some evidence of a Christian who is *not* wearing peace as they should?

Isaiah 26:3 says, *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, (or “stayed on Thee”), because they trust in you.*

Who keeps us in peace?

And what is required of us to be kept in peace?

Do you have peace with God?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I'm not sure

If yes, how do you know for sure?

If you don't have complete assurance you have peace with God, nothing is more important in the whole world than settling that question right now. The Bible tells us if we believe in our hearts that Jesus is Lord and has risen from the dead, and we confess with our mouths that he is our salvation, then we become a Christian. That gives us peace with God. The sin which has kept us from having peace with God is then forgiven and no longer condemns us. PLEASE, this is the most important issue you'll ever face. Make certain you have peace with God.

If you do have peace with God, are you wearing the peace of God?

☐ Most of the time ☐ Not very often

It is the most wonderfully comfortable garment in the whole wardrobe. Once you try it on, you will want to wear it constantly. If you haven't been wearing it much lately, I encourage you to focus on his peace this week. When you feel worry and fear taking away your peace, find a few seconds of quiet to put it back on. It may fall off frequently at first, but don't be discouraged. You can wear the peace of God, as long as you have peace with God and trust him to give you his marvelous peace.

Conclusion

This lesson we've looked at tolerance, forgiveness, and peace—three very beautiful and essential garments in our special wardrobe. Hopefully, you've made some evaluations and decisions about your own life and covenanted with God to learn how to wear these very important clothes.

I encourage you to review this lesson each day this week—early in the day when it can be most beneficial. Remind yourself of what you've learned and what you've decided. *Raise your awareness level!* That is your responsibility. God will make these clothes fit you if you'll set your will to remember and make it a top priority in your day.

Remember, you don't have to feel tolerant to be tolerant. Our feelings are not trustworthy, so put on tolerance, even if you don't feel like it.

Also remember, you may have to put forgiveness on many times—especially if the hurt and pain is deep and long. But start down that road toward forgiveness. Put it on, and when it falls off, put it on again *by faith!* Let God give you forgiveness in exchange for that hurt and bitterness and resentment you've been carrying around.

And make sure that you're wearing both types of peace! Remember, wearing peace doesn't

mean your life is trouble-free. You can wear peace in the midst of hectic, confusing, troubling circumstances. God's peace passes understanding; to me that means I can have peace when, by all rights, I shouldn't be peaceful. That's unreasonable peace—and it's the kind of peace God has for you to wear. Again, wear it by faith.

God bless you as you go out this week to learn how to put on tolerance, forgiveness, and peace. God meant these for you. They come in your size. Accept them and enjoy them!

Suggested Assignment

Continue to refresh your memory and recite Matthew 6:33 and Matthew 11:28-29 every day. And recite all 10 of the garments each day, so you have them imbedded in your mind.

Another good memory verse is Romans 5:1: *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Lesson 5 – Our Special Wardrobe: Thankfulness and Love

Review

Can you quote all three of our memory verses Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:28-29, and Romans 5:1?

Please, once again, recite the list of garments for the inner person which we found in Colossians 3:12-15:

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

In the last lesson we looked at tolerance, forgiveness, and peace.

What would tolerance look like on someone?

If you made a covenant last week to forgive some people, did you keep on forgiving them all week? If so, how did that make you feel?

What is the most important reason we should forgive others?

Did you have peace *with* God this week? How do you know?

Did you wear the peace *of* God this week more than you usually do?

Well, we have two more garments to review in this gorgeous wardrobe God offers us:

Thankfulness

Thankfulness is absolutely essential in your wardrobe if you want to be a well-dressed Christian. Which of the following characteristics would describe a thankful person?

- ☐ Has positive outlook on life.
- ☐ Complains about the weather, the job, the house, the husband, the children, the money the circumstances—etc., etc., etc.
- ☐ Sees the glass as half empty rather than half full.
- ☐ Refuses to take part in the gripe sessions that go on at work.
- ☐ Appreciates the good things they have, rather than focusing on the things they don't have.
- ☐ Is depressed all the time.

Thankfulness is very attractive. When you wear it you have a certain magnetism; people love to be with you. It makes you a positive person and it cures depression.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18. What do you think it means to give thanks in everything?

Have you been wearing thankfulness lately? It is a magical garment, because as we learn to give thanks in every situation, we discover our heaviest burdens grow lighter and easier.

How can you learn to wear thankfulness? Here's a good idea. List below all the things you have to be thankful for—I mean, EVERYTHING! Don't leave anything out. Get another sheet of paper if you have to.

Things I have to be thankful for:

Now, look at that list. I imagine it's a lot longer than you thought it would be. Here's the way to wear thankfulness. Take that list with you everywhere you go. Put it on a card in your purse, on your desk, over your sink, on the dashboard of your car, or your screen saver—anywhere you'll see it often. Then when you feel thankfulness isn't fitting so well, just start reciting the list—out loud if possible.

Remember, you don't have to *feel* thankful in order to *be* thankful.

I guarantee if you will recite the whole list, by the time you finish, you'll be wearing thankfulness. Now, it may fall off again in half an hour. If you've not been wearing it much lately, you'll undoubtedly find that happens. No problem. Just get the list and recite again.

A principle we see throughout Scripture is that we are to remember what God has done for us, and in that remembering we will be blessed. That's what thankfulness is—reminding ourselves of God's faithfulness in our lives. And thankfulness will turn us into positive, attractive, contented people.

Love

And then, as the crowning touch to all the other garments in this unique wardrobe, we need to wear love. Love is the golden chain of all these virtues. It is the finishing touch that brings the whole wardrobe together and blends every garment into a unified appearance.

Love covers up blemishes; it fills in the missing gaps and mends the frayed edges. God's love, worn in our hearts, motivates us to want to wear all these garments.

There are three Greek words for our English translation of the word love. I think you can probably figure out their meanings just by looking at the word. Give it a try:

Eros

Philos

Agape

Now, I'll give you one guess as to which of these original Greek words is used in this passage in Colossians 3:

If you guessed agape, you're right! This is unconditional love—God's kind of love. It is very different from eros—erotic, sensual love, and philos—brotherly love. We see eros and philos love portrayed all around us today. But seldom do we get a real view of God's kind of love in action.

Agape love is described in 1 Corinthians 13. Take time to read that chapter once more, and write down the key words that describe God's kind of love—agape love:

It's always a bit overwhelming to me to see how far short my kind of love is from agape love. I have a suggestion. Choose one of these love characteristics listed above that you want to work on this week. Which one do you need to work on most?

Rubber meets the road time again! Ask God to shed this kind of love in your heart so you can share his love with others this week. Focus on one attribute of love, and then when that one becomes more under control, choose another one to work at. Just start chipping away at it, and by God's grace you'll soon be wearing LOVE. Wow! It's gonna look great on you!

Well, we've gone through all ten of those garments listed in Colossians 3. Here they are, God's garments all ready for you to put on: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, peace, thankfulness, and love. You've heard it said that clothes make the person. Well, whether or not that's true with our outward clothes, it certainly is true with this special wardrobe for our inner persons.

This wardrobe is totally within your reach, you can afford it, it will look absolutely marvelous on you, and will assure you of being a success in your Christian walk. If you wear this wardrobe every day, you can be certain that you will be the best dressed person anywhere you go!

There are a few more basic things about wearing these inner garments that we need to understand.

The Wardrobe Is Worn by Faith

The first thing we must understand is that putting on these garments is not an act of our emotions, it is an act of our will. So often in our Christian walk we want all the feelings in place before we exercise faith.

Let me ask you, do you think it's necessary to *feel* humble in order to *be* humble?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If you don't like someone, is it possible to still love them?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If your stomach feels queasy, does that mean you can't wear peace?

☐ Yes ☐ No

What I'm trying to drive home here is feelings are not to be trusted. Someone once told me that our feelings have zero IQ—that means, they're dumb! Therefore, they could be giving you very inaccurate and false information. If we run on our feelings, these garments will rarely fit us.

We wear these garments by _____ !

The sooner we learn that feelings cannot be trusted and are not a barometer of our spiritual temperature, the sooner we'll be able to take these garments, *by faith*, and wear them.

You wear these garments *by faith*, just as you accepted God's gift of eternal life *by faith*. The act of your *will* is your part; God does the rest.

The Wardrobe Is Not Personality Dependent

It's also good news to realize wearing this wardrobe is not a function of our personalities. Many of these inner garments do not come naturally to our various personalities. But that does not keep any of us from wearing all of them.

I think we often let ourselves off the hook by saying, "Well, that's just the way I am. I can't be anyone else; I have to be myself." We've been fed this current philosophy of being your own person so much we use it to excuse ourselves from whatever we feel doesn't fit our personalities.

For instance, I hear people say, "Well, I'm just a direct person. I say what I think, and that's the way I am. If people don't like it, I can't help it." Or you've probably heard someone say, "My style is to be laid back and relaxed. I'm just not the organized type. So, my boss will just have to accept me that way."

Can you think of some area that you've been guilty of using that kind of excuse? If so, identify it—as painful as that may be!

Now, go back and read Colossians 3:12-15 again. See if you can find where there are any exceptions, based on personality type.

I can save you the time—because I've looked. There are no exceptions! God intends for all of us to wear this beautiful wardrobe, even those of us who aren't patient by nature—or gentle or humble or find it hard to forgive, etc. He has all the garments you can ever need, and they're all in your size. Don't let your personality be an excuse for not making God's best dressed list. It is possible—through Christ—for all of us to wear this entire wardrobe.

Which one of the ten garments comes most easily for you?

Which one is the most difficult for you to wear?

These answers will be different for each of us, because God made us all so different. But it helps to identify them. It might be a good idea to arrange the ten in order of how much we need to work on them. Easiest for me is forgiveness. For some reason, I've never had trouble forgiving people. But difficult for me is patience, gentleness, and humility. It would be hard to determine which one of those gives me the most trouble. So, I pray more about those three than the others, and I concentrate and focus on them the most, without ignoring the others.

Conclusion

Well, we're almost through with our study. Just two more lessons. How do you think you're doing so far?

I trust you'll not give up or be discouraged just because it doesn't seem to happen overnight! You're learning new spiritual principles and it takes a little time. But if your heart's desire is to wear these beautiful clothes, and you'll commit the time necessary to develop a close and growing relationship with God, you're going to be able to look back in a few weeks and months and see how much progress you've made.

Here's another good verse to memorize.

1 Thessalonians 5:18: *Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Be sure to keep reciting Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:28-29, and Romans 5:1 all week, and keep reminding yourself of all ten garments each morning before you start your day. It will make a huge difference in your day.

Lesson 6 – An Uncluttered Closet

Review

Once more, can you quote Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:28-29, Romans 5:1, and 1 Thessalonians 5:18?

List from memory the ten garments we should put on our inner person:

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Which of these garments were you most conscious of this week?

Which one still doesn't fit you so well?

Which one did you see the most improvement in this week?

How do we wear these inner clothes?

Did you find you were consciously more thankful this week?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

What aspect of agape love were you working on (see page 35)? Did it improve this week?

This Wardrobe Needs an Uncluttered Closet

Have you ever come to the place where you've just got to get rid of some old things in your closet before you can put one more garment in there? Periodically I have to force myself to admit I haven't worn some of my things in a long time, I don't think I'll ever wear them again, and they're just taking up needed room in the closet. So, about once a year it's closet-cleaning time and I get rid of the outdated clothes or the ones that don't fit anymore.

Well, we can use that same analogy as we think about our spiritual wardrobe. We need to constantly keep an eye on things that can creep into our lives and fill them up so that we don't have room for the good things which God intends for us to wear.

Maybe one reason you haven't put on all of these beautiful spiritual garments is that there

just is not room in your “closet.” Perhaps your wardrobe is cluttered with all kinds of outdated, ugly clothes. In the same third chapter of Colossians we have a list of clothes we should put off.

Colossians 3:5-10 is given below. I found eleven things listed that we should get rid of. Can you identify them? Circle the things we are to “put off.”

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

We are to put off:

Sexual immorality: Can Christians be guilty of sexual immorality? Unfortunately the answer is yes—far too often. If you've got that in your closet, forget trying to acquire God's wardrobe. They just don't fit together in the same closet. You can't wear God's clothes and please him and at the same time wear sexual immorality.

What do you think sexual immorality includes?

Impurity: How would you define the difference between sexual immorality and impurity?

I believe sexual immorality refers to acts of sexual impurity, while impurity includes thoughts, motivations, etc. Hopefully you've been specific in identifying some of those actions and non-actions which fall into the categories of sexual immorality and impurity.

Read carefully 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Then answer these questions:

Is sexual immorality a worse sin than other sins?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

What differentiates sexual sins from other types of sin?

Why, as Christians, are our bodies of particular significance?

I believe it's clear that sexual sins are ones that can quickly ensnare and enslave us, and therefore we deal with them with even more cautiousness and severity than other sins.

Lust: Lust can be associated with sexual immorality and impurity, such as lusting for someone sexually who is not your marriage partner. But is that the only meaning of the word lust? If you have to, look it up in a dictionary and then define lust as separate from a sexual connotation:

When we start taking a close look at these things we're supposed to put off, we realize far too many of them are hanging in our own closets. We may never have thought of ourselves as lustful, but indeed we might have been wearing it for a long time and calling it something else.

How about you? Can you identify any lust in your life?

Evil desires: Desires are a normal and natural thing for all of us. We all have certain desires, and God loves to give his children their heart's desires. See Psalm 37:4. What is the prerequisite for having our desires fulfilled?

Is it possible to have a good desire turn into an evil desire? Give an example:

Greed: A simple dictionary definition of greed is “an eager and selfish desire; an excessive appetite; grasping.” Perhaps one of the most obvious motivating forces in our world today is greed. Our headlines have been full of stories about people who have been possessed by greed. Give some examples that come to your mind:

It has become quite acceptable to operate from a motive of greed. But it's not acceptable to God. Christians can get caught in this, too. We're not exempt.

Notice Paul tells the Colossians that greed is idolatry. They're not two separate things; they are the same thing. How is it that greed and idolatry are exactly alike?

Somehow when we think of idolaters, we have visions of ignorant people in foreign countries, worshiping wooden or bronze idols, carrying out pagan acts of worship like throwing their

children into the river to appease the gods, etc. But that's not the only form of idolatry, because idolatry is simply a matter of priorities. Whatever or whoever is the most important thing or person in the world to us, that is what we idolize.

Now, this really starts to get close to home. Any and all of us can easily be or become idolaters. If what we want more than anything else is not what it should be, then we have made an idol of that thing we so deeply desire.

Can you look deep in your heart right now and identify what it is that you honestly want more than anything else? What is the most important thing in all the world to you? Look underneath the obvious, look underneath the areas that aren't everything they should be yet, and search your heart for the “gut level” desire that is all-important to you.

More than anything else I want:

It's not easy to know your own heart, is it? I know there is still such selfishness and pride left in me, that I wonder if my motives will ever be totally pure. But I believe, the best I know my heart, that underneath all the stuff God's still working on, my deepest desire is to hear Jesus say to me, “Well done, Mary, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful...” Then I have to dig further and ask, “Why is that so important to me?” And it's because I so want to please him; I so want to make his heart joyful because of me.

Now, I want to tell you this has not always been true. It has only happened as I've gotten to know Jesus. And certainly there are still days and times when I get priorities confused all over again. But the Holy Spirit gets to me pretty quickly now when that happens. I'm too miserable to stay that way very long!

That's why I keep trying to make people see how absolutely essential—and wonderful—it is to spend time regularly getting to know who God is. If you're not doing that, perhaps my Bible study, *A Guide on Getting to Know God*, would be of help. If you will set your heart to get to know God, the greed and idolatry you've been wearing will go. They'll have to!

Now I think we might need to stop here and make a covenant with the Lord. If you've uncovered some greed in your life, if you're not pleased with what you wrote in answer to the question, “More than anything else I want...” then this would be a good time to start to deal

with that. I encourage you not to put this off. Make a covenant with God to get rid of that greed and idolatry.

Lord, I covenant with you to get rid of the greed in my heart, which I realize has become idolatry. I confess that lately the most important thing to me has been:

By your grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit, I want that to change. From now on more than anything else in the world I want:

By faith I believe that you will work this miracle in my life. Thank you.

Signed _____

Anger: Anger is a legitimate reaction to unfair treatment, injustice, and so forth. But if we harbor anger instead of dealing with it properly, then it becomes a part of our wardrobe, and that's when anger becomes a sin.

Read Ephesians 4:26-27. Based on this passage, when does anger become a sin?

Regardless of whether our anger is justified or not, God tells us to put off anger. It is so unbecoming that if we took a look in the mirror and saw just how that anger looks on us, we'd shed it right away.

Have you harbored any anger? Do you need to clean your closet of anger that you should have gotten rid of long ago? Why don't you do that right now? You don't need that anger in your closet any longer!

Rage: The dictionary says rage is violent anger. What types of violence or harm can be done when anger is out of control?

There's no doubt we have to rid our closets of rage if we're going to be God's best dressed person.

Malice: Malice is the desire to see others suffer; spitefulness. It's not hard to be malicious toward someone who has made our life tough or unpleasant.

Can you think of a time that you hoped misfortune would come to someone? Is there anyone now that you would be pleased if something bad happened to them?

If so, that's malice. All of us need to get rid of it quickly.

As I write this, I think of what the old country man said to the preacher one Sunday when he got a little close to home, "You've quit preachin' and gone to meddlin'." Well, if you feel that way, I understand. These questions hit hard, but believe me, they hit me, too. However, it's like surgery that's going to cure us; it hurts a lot, but in the end we're healthy. So, I want to encourage you to face these questions head on and get it out in the open so that the Holy Spirit can deal with it, and you can start learning how to get rid of these ugly clothes that may be in your closet.

Slander: Slander is saying something about someone in order to do them injury or harm. Slander goes on in most of our work environments almost daily. Are you a part of it? How do you think a Christian should react when caught in a conversation of slander and gossip?

Conclusion

In Lesson 6 we've looked at six of the garments we need to get rid of, so we might call this our "closet-cleaning" lesson. Now, I confess closet-cleaning is something I hate to do. What a chore! I put it off as much as I can and just try to ignore it. But sooner or later, if I don't get that closet cleaned out, it's going to drive me crazy.

But doesn't it feel so good when you have it all clean? You just stand there and look at it and say to yourself, "I'm never going to let it get to be such a mess again, because it's so nice to have a clean, uncluttered closet."

Well, this "closet-cleaning" lesson has been like closet-cleaning day—not much fun. But I hope you won't be discouraged. It will be worth it to get rid of these things that have been holding you down and keeping you from knowing total victory in your life.

If some of the questions have probed a little deep, you may want to ignore them. But don't do that. It will just be a worse job when you do get to it. Let the Holy Spirit do in your life what he wants to do today. There's no need to put it off. Once you get these things out of your closet, you're going to be able to put on all those marvelous garments we studied in the first five lessons.

Remember, none of us is immune to any of these things we've discussed in this lesson. We are all sinners by nature, and apart from God's grace, we're all quite capable of wearing any of these ugly clothes. But oh what joy to get rid of them. Isn't it great to know that you don't have to keep wearing them.

So, hang in there. The best is yet to come.

I appreciate you and trust you'll not settle for anything less than God's best for you!

Lesson 7 – Exchanging Our Wardrobe

Review

List the garments found in Colossians 3 that we are supposed to put off. (Not necessarily from memory.)

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Which one gives you the most trouble?

What was the one thing you remembered most from the last lesson?

Can you still quote Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:28-29, Romans 5:1, and 1 Thessalonians 5:18?

Can you name all ten of the beautiful garments we are learning how to wear?

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Now, let's begin this final lesson by looking at the remaining clothes that we need to put off.

Filthy language: Many of you may be exposed and subjected to filthy language on a regular basis. Unfortunately that's true in some environments. Filthy language includes obscenities, off-color jokes or remarks, innuendos, etc. It surely is obvious that these things should never come from our mouths. But should we tolerate it in our presence?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐ I don't know

Well, in my opinion you can't afford to let that filth get into your mind on a regular basis. What things could you do to avoid this kind of talk in your work environment?

Lying: You'd think this one wouldn't be necessary to cover. I mean, everyone knows lying is wrong, right? Stop and think about how lying is treated today. We learn that politicians have lied to us and we don't even get upset about it anymore. We read that people have lied in financial dealings and cheated people out of millions of dollars, and we shake our heads and shrug our shoulders. Lying has become very common.

In fact, "white lies" are acceptable business practices. Can you think of some types of white lies people use every day on their jobs without thinking of them as wrong?

Where do you think God draws the line? What would he have to say about white lies?

If they're unacceptable to God, they should be unacceptable to us as well. We have to keep reminding ourselves that we cannot allow ourselves to be pushed into the world's mold. We have to keep our standards high, and live a life that is totally truthful.

Have you been guilty of some borderline lying? If so, clean it out of the closet so you'll be able to wear God's beautiful wardrobe!

Wow, what an ugly list: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, and lying.

Are there any of these ugly clothes in your closet? They take up so much room and occupy so much of our time and thoughts that we're left with little room for the beautiful clothes that we need to wear. Sometimes we wear these unattractive clothes so long that we begin to feel rather comfortable with them. But until we take them off, we won't know how heavy and confining and unbecoming they really are. They do not look good on anyone, not even once in a while.

Exchanging Our Ugly Wardrobe for His Beautiful One

Below is Isaiah 61:3, one of my favorite verses in Scripture.

...Provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

This verse describes an exchange process. Fill in the missing blanks below.

God has promised to give us:

_____ for ashes;

_____ for mourning;

_____ for a spirit of despair.

It further describes the people who accept this marvelous exchange as, *oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor*. In your own words, what do you think that means?

What an incredible offer this is from our heavenly Father! He wants to exchange all those heavy, ugly, dirty clothes now hanging in our personality wardrobe and in return give us beauty and joy and a garment of praise.

I ask you, in all reasonableness, *how could any straight thinking person refuse his offer?*

Stop and search your heart. Do you really believe it's possible for *you* to wear this special wardrobe for your inner person? Do you think you can become an *oak of righteousness and a planting of the Lord*?

Check one answer:

I believe I can become this kind of person.

☐ Yes ☐ No

It is an exchange process, and if you checked yes, you're on the road. The only thing required is that we be willing to exchange our present unsightly wardrobe for his new garments. We must relinquish the control of our life to the heavenly Father, and be willing to take off our present unattractive clothes, hand them over to him, and accept in exchange these beautiful inner garments that he desires to give us.

In order to help us really understand and remember we have made a choice to exchange our wardrobe for his, let's go through a simple exercise.

Look at the list you made on page 47. That's the list of ugly things we have to get out of our present closets. So, now we're going to clean out the closet. Write below the ones on that list you know you have to deal with.

These are the ugly clothes in my closet which I must clean out:

Now, which of those special garments for our inner person we listed in Lesson 2 (which we hopefully have memorized) do you feel you especially need to work on? List the lovely garments you want to learn to wear.

These are the particular beautiful clothes which I need to focus on the most:

Now you can see the exchange in writing. Here's where you do it *by faith*. Take time now to ask God to help you make this exchange a reality in your mind. I might suggest you write those ugly clothes on a 3 x 5 card, so you can tear it up and throw it away, to symbolically impress on your own mind what has happened *by faith*.

Prayer of Exchange

Dear Lord,

I'm tired of wearing these ugly clothes that are listed here. (Name them specifically, then tear up the card.) I know you are not pleased to see them in my closet. I know I can never be an oak of righteousness or a planting of the Lord for the display of your splendor until I get rid of them. Therefore, *by faith*, I exchange them for the clothes I should be wearing. (Recite the list we've memorized.) I don't exactly know how you're going to accomplish all of this, but I believe you want to and you are able to. So, *by faith*, I exchange my ugly wardrobe for your lovely one. *By faith*, I clean out my old closet and accept these beautiful clothes which you desire to give me.

Thank you for hearing me and answering me. In Jesus' name.

This Wardrobe Should Be Worn Daily

If you really want to be a well-dressed Christian, and wear all of these clothes at once (you won't be overdressed!), I have a suggestion to help you. Make a decision to dress your inner person each day, just as you dress your outer person.

How do you dress the inner person? What does it take to dress ourselves inwardly?

Here are some of my thoughts on what it takes to get dressed inwardly. It takes the following:

DESIRE: You have to want it very much. If it's the desire of your heart, then God has something he can work with. But he will not force these inner garments on you. You must desire them and set your will to wear them.

TIME: In our very first lesson we went through a little calculation to estimate how much time we spend in an average day dressing our outer person. I want you to go back and look at your tabulation which is on page 1 of Lesson 1. Just to refresh your memory, write it down again:

I spend an average of _____ per day dressing the outer person.

Remembering that no one is going to look at your workbook but you, in all honesty, estimate the amount of time per day you've been spending in a one-on-one time with God—reading his Word, praying, meditating. This should not include church time, group Bible study time, listening to Christian radio on the way to work, reading a Christian book, etc.! No, just the time you've specifically set aside to spend alone with God in prayer and Bible reading, getting to know him.

I estimate I now spend an average of _____ per day in a personal one-on-one time with God.

It may shock you to hear that a recent study shows that the average Christian spends less than 5 minutes per day alone with God!

Rubber meets the road time again! Do you spend more time in an average day dressing the outer person or the inner person?

☐ Outer person ☐ Inner person ☐ Tied

In God's view, which is most important, dressing the:

☐ Outer person ☐ Inner person

Do you think you should commit at least as much time dressing the inner person as you do the outer person?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Commitment: Here's the crucial question:

Are you willing to make that commitment? If so, you can use the covenant below to make that commitment to God right now!

I covenant with God to spend more time each day dressing the inner person. I will spend each day between _____ (am/pm) and _____ (am/pm) in a one-on-one basis with God, getting to know him, and learning how to dress my inner person with his beautiful clothes.

Signed _____

As we've gone through this study, we've talked about how to put on each individual garment. You've identified the ones that you need to work on the most, and the old clothes you need to get rid of. Now, put those things in your prayer journal (I hope you have one!) and look at that list each morning as you pray and go through the steps of putting off your old clothes and putting on his.

One of Satan's best methods for defeating us is forgetfulness. He'll try to erase your memory and keep you from thinking about God's inner wardrobe. If you don't find a method to remind yourself and keep this ever before you, you will have wasted your time in the study. Don't allow your enemy to defeat you. Those new clothes will look wonderful on you, and you're going to be happier with yourself than ever before as you see yourself starting to change. It's an incredible experience.

Looking in God's Mirror

Read James 1:23-26. How does James describe a person who hears and understands what God wants him or her to do, and then does nothing about what he or she hears?

What if you checked your mirror just before you were leaving the house one morning and discovered the zipper in your skirt was broken. What would you do?

If I told you I would just shrug my shoulders and say, "Oh, well, too bad the zipper's broken," and left home looking like that, would you think that was too bright? No, of course not.

After we dress each day, the last thing we do is check the mirror. To look in the mirror and discover a serious problem with our clothes, and then do nothing about the problem is rather ridiculous. The whole purpose of looking into the mirror is to remedy any problem before we go out to face the world.

This whole study has been exactly that—we've been looking into God's mirror. You've made many notes all through this workbook of what you've seen, what needs to be "fixed" before you go out the door.

Now, here's the final probing question:

Are you going to walk away from God's mirror without taking the action you need to take?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I'm not sure

Look again at James 1:25. What is promised to the person who looks into God's mirror and continues to do what God has told them to do, not forgetting what he or she has heard?

This person will be _____.

If that's what you want for your life—blessing in everything you do—I urge you not to walk away from God's mirror without doing something about what you saw. The Bible tells us that to those who know to do good and don't do it, to them it is sin.

What happens when you start to take seriously this idea of putting on God's beautiful clothes on a daily basis? Back in the early eighties, as I struggled with lack of patience and kindness and gentleness in my life, God gave me this idea from Colossians 3 as I saw the practicality of thinking of putting on these inner clothes. I have done it almost every day since. I don't plan to ever stop doing it, because I'm never going to get to the place where they all fit just right!

The changes in my life have been incredible. It's like I've been an outsider, watching this person called "me" change. Changes I never thought were possible. And I shake my head and say, "How did that happen?" And the only answer is that I consistently put them on regardless of my feelings, and little by little God has made them a reality in my life.

Some fit me a lot better than others. Some days I wear them better than others. But I can tell you, if you do it with all your heart, if you get rid of the ugly clothes that have to go, and if you exercise *faith* in God to make it happen, it will change you. God is faithful; he cannot lie, and he will do it for anyone who is serious.

This is what began to happen on a day to day basis. I became keenly aware of my lack of these things during the day. That's the first step. As soon as I would be unkind, my spirit would convict me. God's voice inside me, would say, "Kindness just fell off, Mary. Put it back on, please." Then I gradually became aware that I was handling situations and people with more compassion than before. I discovered I really cared about other people's feelings, and I

wanted to be kind and gentle. My speech became more tolerant and kinder. And to my utter amazement, I discovered that I was becoming patient in situations where before I would have been impossible. Oh, there is much room left for improvement, but I can testify that it works to put on God's wardrobe every day.

And when you go to your job wearing these clothes, you're going to stand out as the best dressed woman in your working environment. Everyone loves compassion and kindness, gentleness and love, thankfulness and tolerance, humility, patience, forgiveness, and peace. They're always in style.

Memory Verses

Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 11:28-29

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Suggested promotional announcement for flyers, emails, etc.

What the Well-Dressed Christian Wears

A Bible Study

What the Well-Dressed Christian Wears is a Bible Study that will help you leave home each day dressed for spiritual success! As one of Mary Lowman's most popular messages, it will teach you how to put on the spiritual wardrobe outlined in Colossians 3.

See how to put on:

- Kindness and gentleness—even with people you don't like
- Humility—how to humble yourself
- Patience and tolerance—even if it doesn't come naturally to you
- Thankfulness and compassion—to make you a truly positive person

Whether you're already knowledgeable about the Bible or just curious to know more, you'll find these brief lessons an oasis in your busy day.

A participant's guide is available, but no homework is required! You can contact me for a guide in advance or it will be available at the first session.

We'll start and stop right on time. So, please join us:

When:

Time:

Place:

For more information, contact:

What the Well-Dressed Christian Wears

Leader's Guide

Thank you for being willing to lead this Bible Study. The good news is you don't have to teach this study, just lead the discussion. If leading a Bible study is new to you, don't worry. You don't have to be an expert on the Bible or a trained teacher to lead this study.

The participant's guide is easy to follow, with questions designed to get everyone involved. Your job is to guide the discussion through the various questions, keep track of time, and keep the discussion moving.

Leading the Sessions

Here are some key things to keep in mind as you lead the sessions:

- You will want to study the lesson in advance, so you are thoroughly prepared to help with the discussion.
- Have the room set up in advance ready to welcome your guests.
- **Always** begin and end on time. Regardless of how many people arrive on time, you need to establish that they can depend on this study starting and ending on time. However, some will still come late or have to leave early, and you want to make it clear from the beginning that they have this flexibility and are welcome whenever they can get there.
- Explain that this study is meant to be a discussion and encourage everyone to participate. However, do not put pressure on those who may be hesitant to speak, especially during the first few sessions. Don't be afraid of silence. People may need time to think about the question before formulating their answers. It's always good to solicit more than one answer to a question. Ask, "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anyone else?"
- Affirm the contributions of others whenever possible. Let people know you appreciate their insights. If you feel a response is wrong—not in accordance with God's Word—don't reject it. Rather ask something like, "How did you come to that conclusion?" Or ask others in the group what they think about the question.
- Be considerate of first timers. It's often best not to call on them for an answer, as they may not feel comfortable contributing the first time they participate. Keep that in mind if you choose to ask for participation by going around the table or the circle. Everyone may not want to contribute, especially first timers.
- Keep the discussion on track. It's easy for people to start down their own bunny trails and take the discussion in a different direction than the study intends. It will be your responsibility to bring the discussion back to the workbook and keep it moving, otherwise you will have difficulty completing the lesson.

- Remember the purpose of the study is to understand what the Bible has to say, and

therefore personal opinions have to be considered in light of what Scripture says. Whether or not a person agrees with what the Bible says, you want to keep bringing the discussion back to the biblical foundation.

- Avoid letting any one person monopolize the discussion. Obviously some people are more verbal than others, but if one person begins to answer every question and intimidate others from participating, it will have a negative impact on the group. It is your challenge to include that person but not allow them to take over!
- Avoid discussing various churches or denominations. Never allow anyone to malign or gossip about a church, an organization or a person, even if you must interrupt that person.
- Encourage the members of the group to look at the lessons in advance, if possible, but don't put any undue pressure on them.
- Most importantly, pray! Ask God to give you wisdom as the leader, to bring the people he wants into the study, and to use it for his glory. Bathe your efforts in prayer, asking other trusted friends to pray with you, so that at each step of the way, you are attuned to God's voice and covered in prayer. This is truly critical to your success.

About The Christian Working Woman:

In 1984 Mary Lowman began this ministry as a once-a-week radio program on one station in Chicago. Her passion then, as now, was to challenge workplace Christians to see their jobs as more than just a place to earn a living. Every Christian is called to be an ambassador for Jesus Christ in all areas of their lives, including the workplace.

The ministry has grown from that small beginning to now being broadcast on over 400 stations nationally and internationally. Mary has written many books and Bible studies. All of these are available online at www.christianworkingwoman.org or by calling 630-462-0552.



Have you been encouraged and challenged in your faith through this Bible study? You can help other women around the world experience this same joy and growth in their faith when you donate to The Christian Working Woman. Your monthly or one-time gift ensures that women continue to receive these free resources as they seek to shine the light of Christ in their workplaces.

Simply scan the QR code or click [here](#) to give today.

