

Beauty & the Hidden Life: Lies the World has Told Women and the Truth the Church Offers

Paige Rien - 2025-02-06

INTRODUCTION: We welcomed back Paige Rien as she gave a talk about making our home a sacred place for family to grow and flourish by refuting some of the lies the world tells us. Paige talked about how her conversion to the Faith eventually led her to a conversion of how she views the home and interior decorating. Not that long ago, she was completely obsessed with interior design, house projects, constant tinkering, thinking what could she change. She loved it all, the magazines, the shows, the influencers. She wanted to be an influencer herself, create content, encourage others to make their houses and change them. But she is no longer there. She is no less focused on her house today, but it is through a much different lens. She is no less vested in her home, but it is through a different perspective, the perspective of the Church. When we find ourselves caught up in a hamster wheel of excitement, desire, and even confusion about the home and making it better, making it great, it is not of God. It is what the secular world is encouraging. God has something else to say.

WOMEN ARE DIFFERENT: Paige learned from a book entitled The Male Brain, that the female brain and the male brain are very different in how they work. The eyes, an extension of the brain, operate differently in women. Our eyes are designed to read faces, to determine how best to care for those in our care. This is what makes us nurturers. As a function of this gift, and how God designed us, He made our focus within a smaller footprint, we are focused on the domestic sphere, whereas men are focused outside, on a larger footprint, a wider view, outside the domestic sphere. Men do not care about the house the way we do.

THE GIFT: Paige has always been interested in interior design, and she now sees it as part gift, and part brokenness, as is the case with most of the gifts we possess. She was always drawn to color, pattern, shape, composition. She also believed that the exterior really matters. In the absence of the knowledge of God's love for us, we resort to the world's perspective that the best looking people get the best stuff, the best looking house must get us to the best life. And if we do not look good on the outside, we are not lovable, or eligible for any of the good stuff. Paige translated this perspective to her feelings about the house: if the house just looks great, if she could present an exterior that was perfect, than it was all good. Why else would she make the house great?

She somehow landed a job at HGTV as an interior designer, and got to see the American home owner up close. She was matched up with families that wanted to get some design answers for their homes. She learned a lot about the secular world, the market economy, where we live. The world is asking us to take ourselves out of the picture, out of the home, encouraging us to leave everything personal out. The world assumes that most of us want a vanilla option, bigger, bland, not too personal. Then Paige noticed that all the design media she watched and all the magazines she read with great enthusiasm never contained any expressions of faith. She is passionate that the home should reflect who we really are, and yet with all the design media shying away from any expressions of faith, it would appear that no one believes in anything!

THE CHURCH AND THE HOME: Then Paige learned about what the Church has to say about the home. The family is the domestic Church, and the domestic Church is one of the three parts of the Catholic Church! The other two parts are the Hierarchy (the pope, bishops and priests) and the Parish (Parish life and community). Family and home are one third of the Catholic Church. The importance and the sanctity and the potential of the home is depended on by the Church to be successful in the world.

Paige sees the house as an engine. The house is so much more than what it appears from the outside. It is so much more than things and visual composition. The visual composition is just one small fraction of the house. The house is a powerful engine that allows for human flourishing, and is a place where we live out our vocations to love, serve, grow and help others do the same. It is the context in which God has chosen us to become saints. This is the context, the human family, our domestic Church, the context God has chosen for us. Removed from the lives of secular culture, we can do the Kingdom's work and be part of the spiritual productivity that extends for generations. Can our decorative items extend for generations? While our culture tends to value things over people, our church teaches us that it is the people that matter! Mother Teresa said the best and surest way to know the love of Jesus is through the family. Our greatest circle of influence is our own home, even if we live alone, for it includes all those we welcome into our home.

TEN LIES (NINE ACTUALLY!): Paige then proceeded to discuss ten lies, (but she skipped number 8, so there are really only nine) that we as women have been taught by the world.

LIE #1 – “They” know what to do and we do not. “They” have the answers for the home, but we do not.

This lie has been developed over time, as the art of interior design evolved. “They” are the interior designers who know the answers for the home that we do not. Even if we do not know design, or claim we are not good at it, we know ourselves, our story, our spouses, our children, our home. We know our house intimately, where it is warm, where it is cold, where it is light, where it falls short, where there are bottlenecks, spaces that bring the family together, spaces that keep them apart. All of this information is vital to a conversation with an outside design consultant, and need to inform the decisions we make. Often we are flooded with what we do not know, so before we begin any sort of house project with outside help, we need to review ALL that we do know.

LIE #2 – A pretty house will make you happy, and give you a great family life.

We need beauty and order, but it does not trump everything else. Beauty and order are only of value if they are in support of what we are doing in the family, in the domestic Church. What good are beautiful things that are fragile, that no one is allowed to touch, and that create obstacles for the family to avoid? Not only do they get in the way, but by valuing, protecting, and reserving space for them, we are putting things over people. We are built for communion, and our relationships drive our happiness. If we forget this, we have no chance of being happy in our pretty house. We can enjoy brief moments of peace and order in the house, but the house/engine is only working when there are people in it and messing it up! Problems in the home can be opportunities to challenge ourselves to live in gratitude with them, and if they cause us suffering, to offer them up. We may then choose to change them, but we also acknowledge that some problems may never change, and fixing them may not bring us the peace and happiness we anticipated. Things cannot solve our problems!

LIE #3 – Women call the shots when it comes to what the house looks like.

Ask my wife! Paige believes husbands do care, and should be represented in the house. Without their representation, the danger is that the narrative becomes that it is “mom’s house,” and not the house of the family, which could set up a feminized design scheme. The Church tells us that the husband is the leader of the household, and his input is rightly in the conversation about the direction of the house. When the house has everybody’s input, when everyone under the roof is represented in the fabric of how the house looks and feels, it does work better. Paige suggested we ask our spouses what they think we could do together to make the house more man friendly, more comfortable, or a better reflection of the entire family.

LIE #4 – There is a right way and there is a wrong way.

There are millions of ways. We have a profound range in what our houses can be. It can be overwhelming at times. There is no wrong way. The house is a composition of many different things, including the people, us, our stories, the artifacts of our lives that produce a whole. All the individual choices of carpet, floor, counter tops, will recede into the composition. And the Church tells us that things are not the main point. Let us weaken the intensity on some of the choices. Whatever we are struggling with in the house, let us take it to daily Mass or to Adoration for a week. We do not have to act immediately on non-emergency house problems. Take it to the Lord.

LIE #5 – Our home is all about us and our self-expression, and says a lot about us.

This is a huge lie that adds so much pressure. It is all about how the world views our house, and consequently, how it views us, but this is the wrong focus. There is much talk about a “statement piece.” What does this mean? These are furniture pieces or articles that make a statement. But there is no statement. The house has nothing to say. The house has much greater work than to make statements. It is about what the house is saying to those who live there, and not the world outside. In the past, Paige spent significant time and effort decorating the front door to ensure curb appeal. It was only later that she realized that her family (who should have mattered the most) typically used the side door and were not being adequately welcomed each day. How can we decorate the side doors in our houses to convey to the people using them that they are the ones who matter most? Sally Clarkson, author of The Life Giving Home, talks about aesthetics and beauty in a way to cultivate belonging and express love to our family.

LIE #6 – If you really want, you can have a prayer corner.

Our culture makes it sound like a prayer corner is just a small out of the way place that does not “interfere” with the rest of the house. But if we are to pray unceasingly, then the whole house can be a welcome place for prayer, and not just a small corner. There is no problem with a prayer corner as it provides a segregated, quiet, dedicated space for prayer, but she challenged us to make the whole house a place of prayer – leave a Bible on the kitchen counter, leave prayerful things in other places, make the entire house hospitable to prayer.

LIE #7 – Real estate appreciation is the ultimate goal.

The secular world tells us our greatest achievement in life is to sell high! Our house is an asset that we are supposed to protect, but the idea of resale being the ultimate goal is dangerous, because then the focus for home improvements is to increase the resale value rather than on improving the lives of those who live there. If we plan to live in a house five years or longer, we should not worry about the next owner. We need to focus on what matters most to our family, and our domestic Church.

LIE #9 – Real life is ugly. (Paige went straight to 9, skipping over 8).

The secular world tells us that real life needs to be put away, organized, or hidden. For prior generations, the hidden life was truly hidden. In more recent times, the exposing of the home through TV, magazines and social media has given us a false sense of what the home is, largely because what we see is sterilized, staged to look a certain way, and we hold this up as some kind of ideal. The hidden life is meant to be private. Paige said sometimes the images of the home for women act in a way similar to pornography for men. The images lie about what the house should look like, they lie about how family life operates, they ruin our real version of life; like pornography does for sex and women. It is not real women, and it is not real sex. Houses do not look like that, and family life is much more complicated and messy than media shows. Greatness is built in the mundane, in the normal, in the routine. Greatness, sainthood, beauty are built over time through the day to day life. One of Paige’s favorite scriptures is “Let us not grow tired of doing what is good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest if we do not give up” (Gal 6:9). Paige sees this as the daily life in our homes. Every woman in America needs to hear this – let us not grow tired of doing the dishes, making the meals, vacuuming, doing the laundry, wiping the noses. We were told that our mundane work that is leading us to greatness is drudgery. It is not. We need to see sanctifying grace and beauty in the day to day.

LIE #10 – Gather inspiration from others.

This tells us not to trust ourselves, copy other women, pick a style, apply it and move on. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). We are supposed to do some testing. We have to explore, to make mistakes. We are not going to find the answers on the internet! We are not supposed to look like the world. We can come up with our own ideas, separate from the noise of what everyone is telling us to do. The danger is others may not like it, but they do not live here. The engine is not fueled by information or what to buy.

CONCLUSION: The house is far more important than we can possibly imagine, but not in the way it looks, but in the way it operates. God gave us our domestic Church, our vocation, and our role in it is also a gift. Our vocation is a better guide than any media or any professional we will ever encounter. Let it guide us. Our house will look different in the world, but it is supposed to look different.