



Daily Devotionals: God Is Beautiful | September 5, 2021

Day 1 – Devotionals

Theologian R.C. Sproul once remarked that he was:

Afraid that the idea of the beauty of God has been all but eclipsed in our contemporary culture, both in the secular community and in the church as well. I've said many times that there are three dimensions of the Christian life that the Scriptures are concerned about—the good, the true, and the beautiful. Yet we tend to cut off the third from the other two. Some Christians reduce their concern for the things of God purely to the ethical realm, to a discussion of righteousness or of goodness with respect to our behavior. Others are so concerned about purity of doctrine that they're preoccupied with truth at the expense of behavior or at the expense of the holy. Rarely, at least in many Protestant circles, do we find a focus on the beautiful.

Beauty, or seeing God as beautiful, is just as essential to our growing in our faith as knowing correct doctrine *about* God. But what is beauty? What does it mean that God is beautiful?

Well, we know intuitively when something is beautiful. *Why* something is beautiful is a bit harder to put into words. All we know for sure is that, as the theologian Thomas Aquinas says, beauty is “that which, when seen, pleases.”

Take, for example, what you experience when you set your gaze upon a vast mountain range dotted with richly green pines, or what happens when you get outside of the city and can crook your neck back to stare at specks of light scattered on the dark canvas of the sky, or when you go walking through the park and can hear the heart-song of a thousand birds all at once. All of these examples (and I'm sure you can think of quite a few of your own) do something to us that *stops us in our tracks*.

James Bryan Smith, in his book *The Magnificent Story*, says just that of beauty – that it stops us in our tracks. It causes us to stop, to pause, to ponder, to lose our words, to cry, to be awestruck,



to smile, to be mesmerized, and to be caught up in something transcendent, something beyond ourselves. Beauty is powerful.

I often wonder if we need to recapture awe and wonder for the Lord our God. If perhaps we need to take time to consider just how beautiful our God is. As David writes in **Psalm 27:4**, “One thing I have asked of the LORD, that I will seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the *beauty* of the LORD and to inquire in his temple” (bold and italics mine).

All of the beauty that we encounter in our world – the laugh of a child, the color of the sky, the musical expertise of our favorite artist – all of these beautiful things point beyond themselves to something higher, something beyond. They all point us to the Being from which beauty proceeds. Why? Because beauty opens the mind to the consideration of ever higher forms of beauty, ultimately leading to the source of all beauty itself.

And it’s in encountering that beautiful Being that has led so many people throughout history to fall on their knees in adoration and worship. Consider just a few examples from history.

Consider St. Augustine from the 4th century AD. This is what happened to St. Augustine when he thought of God. He once wrote,

*Late have I loved you, **Beauty** so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.*

Isn’t a paragraph like that *beautiful*? Or how about poetry from King David of the Old Testament when he writes about God in Psalm 63, saying,



*You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.*

*I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.
Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.
I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.
I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.*

*On my bed I remember you;
I think of you through the watches of the night.
Because you are my help,
I sing in the shadow of your wings.
I cling to you;
your right hand upholds me.*

*Those who want to kill me will be destroyed;
they will go down to the depths of the earth.
They will be given over to the sword
and become food for jackals.*

*But the king will rejoice in God;
all who swear by God will glory in him,
while the mouths of liars will be silenced.*



Or perhaps try this poem from John Donne, an English poet who lived in the 16th century:

*Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town to another due,
Labour to admit you, but oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.*

All of these men, from Augustine to Donne, when uttering these words were caught up in something powerful – something transcendent, something beyond what reason, intelligence, rationality could fully comprehend. They were caught up in the beauty of God.

Can you imagine writing such a paragraph about the God in Heaven? Could you imagine constructing such a poem? Could you imagine creating such sonnets?

Maybe. But also maybe not. Maybe you do not find God to be beautiful for one reason or another. Maybe it's because you do not think Him to be good. Maybe it's because you do not think God cares about you. Maybe it's because God feels distant. There could be many reasons.

Take some time, as we end today's reflection, to consider how we relate to the beauty of God (we'll have time to dig into God's beauty in the days to come).



Questions for reflection:

1. Do you find God beautiful? Why or why not?
2. Similarly, but a bit different, do you tend to think of God as beautiful when you think about God? What other adjectives do you think about first when you think about Him (e.g., He's all-powerful, He's all-knowing, etc.)? What does your initial thought about God tell you about how you perceive Him in your life?
3. Take a few moments to construct a poem, a prayer, a picture, or some other piece of art that will allow you to experiment expressing how you feel about God and His beauty. *You don't have to share this with your life group, but it might be kind of neat to see and hear and experience with everyone else!*



Day 2 – Look at the book

For today's work, let's look at a text that doesn't so much give us a definition of glory, but rather one that puts God's glory and an appropriate response on display. Take a few moments to prayerfully read through these different vignettes of Jesus. Since Jesus is God in the flesh, when we want to see the beauty of God, it might be helpful for us to look at the person of Christ.

One additional note: you don't have to look at all three of these verses. Feel free to linger on only one or two. The goal isn't to "get through these" but to see the beauty of Christ. So...slow down...and admire our Lord.

As you read, do three things:

1. Circle any personally significant words or phrases, especially ones that display God's beauty to you
2. Ask and note below each passage anytime you feel like the beauty of Christ challenges the ugliness in our world (or even potentially in your own heart)
3. Ask yourself, "What is beautiful about Jesus here?" and then jot down your thoughts.

John 8:1-11

1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.



9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

11 “No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

John 13:1-15

1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

7 Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”



8 “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

9 “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”

10 Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

Matthew 27:11-50

11 Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“You have said so,” Jesus replied.



12 When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. 13 Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” 14 But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

15 Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. 16 At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. 17 So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” 18 For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

19 While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”

20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

21 “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor.

“Barabbas,” they answered.

22 “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked.

They all answered, “Crucify him!”

23 “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”



25 All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”

26 Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

27 Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

32 As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. 33 They came to a place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). 34 There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. 35 When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 36 And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. 37 Above his head they placed the written charge against him: This is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

38 Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” 41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42 “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” 44 In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.



45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 49 The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.



Day 3 – Scripture survey

As we look at God’s beauty this week, we need to realize that (like we stated on Day 1), beauty is something hard to put into words. When we talk about God’s beauty, it often comes to us as it’s mediated through something else – nature, other people, art, etc. These forms of beauty and these facets of creation point beyond themselves to Someone even more beautiful. So where can we go to get glimpses of God’s beauty in Scripture other than looking directly at Christ’s life?

For starters, we can look at a few passages that directly talk about God’s beauty. Next, we can look at some of His creation and get a sense of His beauty through passages that talk about what He has created! And finally, we can get a sense of God’s beauty by looking at His character. That’s what we’ll do below. We’re going to look at passages that directly talk about God’s beauty, that talk about His creation, and that talk about His character.

Take a few moments to slowly read through the passages below. As you read, take some time to ask yourself these three questions:

1. What does this passage teach me about God’s beauty?
2. What questions do I have about this?
3. God, what are you inviting me into as I read and look through these verses?

Psalm 27:4; Psalm 50:2; 1 Chronicles 16:29

Hint: If your translation says “splendor” in the 1 Chronicles verse just replace it with the word “beauty”



Genesis 1:1-31; Revelation 21:1-7

Isaiah 40:1-31



Day 4 – Story Work

We keep coming back to the quote from A.W. Tozer, who said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” Today, we want to reflect on how God’s beauty intersects with us personally, to see how God’s beauty has done or could do something to us.

To begin today, reread **Psalm 27:4**. Then, use the questions below to interact with the theme of God’s beauty.

1. Do you think that you can stand in solidarity right now and say that the only thing you ask for is to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD? Why or why not?
2. What are times in your life where God seemed, not beautiful to you, but ugly? What caused that perception to come about?
3. How have you reconciled times when God seemed ugly to you? Where are you still wrestling with a perception that God might not be the epitome of beauty?
4. How do you think a perception of God having semblances of ugliness affects the way you relate to Him?



Day 5 – Response

For this last day, let's slow down and pay attention to what God has been inviting us into as a result of our work this week. Find a quiet space. Silence any technology around you. Spend some time reviewing your devotions this week. Jot down your thoughts to the following reflection questions.

As you begin, read **1 Peter 2:11-12**.

Note: if your translation says "Keep your conduct honorable..." another way to translate that would be to "Keep your conduct beautiful..."

As you look over this week, what words, phrases, Scriptures, etc. have stood out to you? What was the most significant thing? Why?

How have you seen God's beauty over the course of this past week? Where has He seemed ugly to you?

What is God inviting you to DO as a response to this week's reflections? How might He be asking you to live beautifully this week?



Consider some of these suggestions as possible action steps as you step into living this week's truths:

- Create a piece of art by yourself or with your kids – a poem, a song, a picture, carve a wooden figure, etc. to express what God's beauty means to you.
- Go outside for an extended period of time and notice God's beauty in creation.
- Brainstorm with your family to come up with one beautiful action step to pursue this week, and do it!
- Watch the film "Life is Beautiful" with your life group or family and then talk about what was beautiful about the movie.