

Are You Creative?

If you begin reading the Bible at the beginning, by the time you reach Genesis 1:26 the primary attribute of God that you have encountered is that God is creative. *God is creative.* Those three words are obvious when we stop and think about them, but we rarely stop and think about them. *God is creative.* God being creative is the first truth we learn about God in the Bible.

In Genesis 1 we read of God creating all of life *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. God spoke the universe into existence. All land and water, all animals, everything became alive by the creative power of God.

Then, in Genesis 1:26, and again in 1:27, we read that God created us, humans, in His image and likeness. Every human has the status of God's imagers, God's representatives on earth in his likeness. This means we too are creative.

We are creative. Those three words are also obvious when we stop and think about them, but we rarely stop and think about them. We are creative. We are uniquely creative. Birds make nests, some of which are beautiful, but no bird stands back from its nest and says, "You know, a little more color here and there would really do the trick."

-Pastor Matt Peery

Gifts

"In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth." (Genesis 1:1) He made it for us. He is the Creator; He created everything including us. When He created us He gave us each a gift. "God's gifts of grace come in many forms. Each of you has received a gift in order to serve others. You should use it faithfully." (1 Peter 4:10) Some people are good at speaking, some people are good at writing, some people are good at teaching, some people are good at listening and some people are good at singing. People are unique and have many different gifts and talents. God gave me a gift. He gave me a gift to create. I love to crochet, sew, knit, and do other crafts that I can make with my hands. It is relaxing and fun to take a ball of yarn or a yard of fabric and turn it into something that other people can use or enjoy.

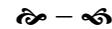
No, such a statement can only come from those who not only make things for survival purposes, but who create out of the pure pleasure of creating, who create out of their essence reflecting the One whose image they bear.

You and I being creative is not up for debate. It is not a matter of opinion or perspective or personality. It is not that some are creative. We all are creative. God declared that the first people, and all people, are His image bearers and in His likeness. This means we, like God, are creative.

You may not think of yourself as creative, but you are. To plan, prepare, and cook meals, everyday, for ten children is a creative task, Jenny Williams. Making a yard well landscaped, welcoming and beautiful, takes creativity, Mary Dunn. I could go on and on. Sewing, gardening, parenting, teaching, playing sports, playing music, all these and much more take creativity. And when we use our creativity for God's glory we are being the people God created us to be. We are reflecting His image, displaying Him through being like Him.

Beauty in God's Creation

In this issue we focus on the beauty that is displayed in God's creation, and how we can appreciate it.



"One thing have I asked of the Lord,
that will I 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."

-Psalm 27:4

"See, I have called by name Bezalel. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, to create artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, so that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship."

-Exodus 31:2-5

"Beauty is the battlefield where God and the devil war for the soul of man."

-Fyodor Dostoevsky

"From the beginning Western Civilization has seen the experience of beauty as calling us to the divine."

-Roger Scruton

"For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made."

-Romans 1:20

My Mom tells me she sees the students walking around wearing them and she sees they are excited to have them. This makes me happy that I could help them. I have made 315 masks. My goal is to make 500 or more.

Giving a gift can make someone's day and make them smile. It makes them feel like they are loved. I want everyone to feel loved. God shows me love and I want to share His love with others. "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35) I am thankful for the creative gifts God gave to me and the opportunities to bless others.

-Lauren Robinson

Snowflakes, Sunsets and Spiderwebs

When I walk through an art museum, there are certain displays that catch my eye and cause me to stop and admire the work. Usually it is a composition from the Impressionist era that gets my attention. I am drawn to the artist's use of color, light and painting techniques. The same is true when I go for a walk or a car ride. There are images that catch my eye and cause me to stop, admire the work, and often take a picture. When I am out in nature I see artwork everywhere. It is like walking through an art museum, but I never have to look for the label identifying the artist. The Artist is God - the One who created it all. "In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land." (Psalm 95:4-5)

When an artist is creating a piece of artwork, there are elements and principles of design that he/she mentally sorts through and then applies to make his/her work visually appealing. I think back to my college classes and can hear Dr. Allman saying, "Stand back and look at your work. Is it balanced? What else can you do to make it flow and connect? Is there unity?" In addition, I must not leave out Mr. Barr, my four-hour drawing class professor, standing behind me with his mug of coffee saying, "Is there a foreground and a background? What is the focal point in your drawing?" As I look at the world around me, I cannot help but notice these elements and principles of art beautifully displayed in the most incredible art gallery for us to view - Creation.

God has shown us His incredible artistic skills in perfectly designed masterpieces and displayed them throughout nature for us to enjoy.

Take for example snowflakes with their unique designs & shapes - amazing!

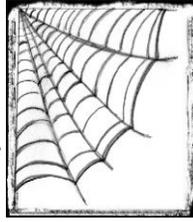


I have always been fascinated by these little detailed works of art falling from the winter sky. Snowflakes are fantastic examples of symmetry and balance.

What about the beautiful, vibrant colors stretched across the sky as the sun rises and sets? Gorgeous! You can almost see the individual brushstrokes of these outstanding large-scale paintings.



I am not a fan of spiders if they are in my house, but when the sunlight shines just right on a spider's woven masterpiece, I will stop to view its impressive work. There is a remarkable use of line and pattern displayed in each web.



God has provided us with peaceful, calming images, but also images that are so extraordinary that we cannot help but recognize His power, His creativity, and His presence. I see how He has included so much detail even down to the intricate patterns of a spider's web and how everything plays a part in the whole picture. I see how He created all living things and out of all creation, we (people) were chosen to have a relationship with Him. We are part of the whole picture. We were made to serve and worship Him and to further His kingdom. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

However, we struggle with unity and balance as seen in our history as well as in the news today. The world can sure get chaotic, messy and loud. It can distract us so easily. We should continue to ask ourselves the questions my art professors asked me in college: "What is our focal point? What is in our foreground and what should remain in our background? Is there balance and unity in our lives?" We live in a fast paced world that clogs our brain with so much noise, but there are peaceful, beautiful works of art all around us showing us balance, unity and harmony. I find comfort in seeing His handiwork in my daily paths and look forward to seeing the beautiful masterpieces that will be displayed in heaven. "But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him' - these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit." (I Corinthians 2:9-10) Until that day comes, I am thankful for the artwork around me: the snowflakes, the sunsets and the spiderwebs that cause me to stop, refocus, and stay in tune to my relationship with Him.

-Trish Robinson

Water: Logic of the Logos

When we read the creation account of Genesis, we see that God creates an order, a structure to His creation. This order is depicted as we see Him separate light from darkness (vss. 3, 4), then we see increasing separations and diversity of elements such as water separating from water, with the sky (heavens) appearing (vss. 6-8), followed by the seas and the earth (vss. 9, 10). Throughout this account is a beautiful, increasingly-complex progression of creative activity. Following the foundational creation of the structure of the universe, the stage was now set for the subsequent creation of all forms of life - plants, animals of all kinds, an ultimately humans. According to the account, this was done by God by the power of his word. God literally "spoke" the all of creation into existence. Each stage of creation is prefaced with the phrase "And God said..."

When the Apostle John wrote his account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, he chose to open his account with terminology which would have been familiar to his Jewish audience, but also to the Greek cultural and philosophical background of his Gentile audience. John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." (Joh 1:1-3 ESV) John wrote this in the Greek language, and where he uses the English word "Word," it is translated from the Greek word "logos." This is understandable to the Jewish readers because of the obvious power of God's word as He spoke all of creation into existence in perfect order. For the Gentile audience, familiar with the philosophers, this word "logos" carried the meaning of not only "word" as we would think of it, but also meaning "reason" or "plan." This is why we use the word "logic" in English to describe a reasoned, organized collection or sequence of ideas. The creation account in Genesis is the epitome of logic. As God organizes creation, it is a perfect progression of logical steps to produce the perfect result, as God repeatedly says, "...it was good." If something is accounted as "good" by God, it must be perfect because perfection is His standard of "good."

Even though corruption entered the creation because of sin, not all of the beauty of God's creation was destroyed, and we can see this beauty all around us if we will take the time to appreciate it.

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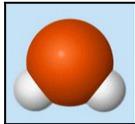
Water...

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As the apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:20, "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made." This divine beauty is visible, certainly in the large things around us (nature, mountains, seas, sun, moon, planets and stars, etc.), and also in the things that are too small for us to see with our eyes.

There is a beautiful, perfect logic to the structure of matter, too small to see, but detectable by our senses and modern scientific methods. How is it that two simple elements such as hydrogen and oxygen (both gasses in their separate natural states) can come together to form a liquid called "water" with wonderful, complex, and unique properties? God ordered it that way by His "word," his logic from the beginning! If we could see one molecule of water, what would it look like? We don't know for certain, but we can make a good guess... it would look something like this:

If we then take liquid water and make it cold, it can form something beautiful, ice crystals. Snow is an



example of ice crystals, and it is thought that no two snowflakes are alike, because the unique properties of water mean that it can form an almost infinite number of shapes, but always ordered in some familiar patterns. What does the water molecule look like when it is frozen into ice? Again, the best guess of science is that it would look something like this example showing three water molecules frozen together:

What we see is that when water is frozen, the water molecules begin to "stick"



or bind to one another in orderly patterns, but can do so in several different ways so that they can form the wonderful variety of snowflakes we see (see Trish's article on the previous page!). Some scientists say that water's unique properties are responsible for life itself. Of course, we know that God is the source of life, but it is clear when we study nature and chemistry that He has used water as part of the created order to support life in a beautiful way. Praise God, the Logos, who is also our Creator and Savior Jesus, for the beauty and life-giving power of His logic!

-Joe Council

The Evangelism of Beauty

All around us are signposts pointing us to the Lord. Beauty is one of these. Just as all truth points us to the One who is truth, and just as everything good points us to the One who is perfectly good, so too beauty points us to the One who is purely and wholly beautiful. This is God's purpose for beauty. A beautiful sunset is not merely to be marveled at, it is also meant to captivate our minds and hearts in wonder at the artist who orchestrates such a sight. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." The beauty of creation is God's way of saying to us, "Look, do you see how magnificent my handiwork is? Now imagine how magnificent I am." God has meant for beauty to lead us to Him. We are made for beauty because we are made for God.

This evangelistic aspect of beauty is not only true of God's creative works in creation, it is also true of the creative works we produce. The beauty of a decorated home points the family who resides there to their eternal homeland. Jesus said He has gone to prepare a place for us, and that in His Father's house there are many rooms. And we know the place Jesus is preparing for us in the Father's house is not ugly, but beautiful. The beauty of our current homes, yards and gardens, however modest and simple, entice our hearts and minds for our true and everlasting home. Think of the Tabernacle and Temple in ancient Israel. In Exodus 31 we read of God setting apart Bezalel and Oholiab to decorate and furnish the Tabernacle. Gold, silver, bronze, jewels, stone, and wood were all to be artistically crafted with designs. There was also to be incense and finely worked garments for Aaron and his sons. Why? Why all of this art? Why all this fashion, this decor, this atmosphere? It was to point the Israelites to God. As the Israelites experienced the beauty of God's house their minds and hearts were lifted to the beautiful majesty of God Himself.

We have all experienced the enticing and luring affect of beauty. This may most commonly be experienced through music. Music has a profound propensity to pull on our heart-strings. Music can transport us beyond the here and now, lifting us to the transcendent.

Music, and beauty in general, make us aware that we were made for more than anything this world has to offer. As C. S. Lewis famously said, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

The younger generation today, those in their teens and twenties, hold beauty in high regard. There is a fascination among young people today with beauty and the experience of beauty. This gives all of us the opportunity to share with them the One who is Beauty. To share with them that the longing they experience listening to certain music, or watching a certain movie, is actually longing of their souls for the Great Creator, the One who made them, and is behind all beauty. Brothers and sisters, may we not squander this opportunity. May we not allow "The Arts" to be monopolized by non-believers. May we fill our own lives with beauty, anticipating the day when we shall "behold the beauty of the LORD." (Psalm 27:4)

-Pastor Matt Peery

Beauty of the Meek

O brothers and sisters, we must be meek, and be beautified with salvation, for then we shall be able to attract others to Christ! If we want to draw them to him, we must let them see how sweetly blessed is the Christian life, and how a man can face stern trials, and yet at the same time be blessedly cheerful, — how he can be dead against sin, and yet full of holy love to the sinner, — how he would not, to save his life, budge an inch from that which is right and true, and yet would give his life away if by blessing another he might bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord beautify us thus with salvation, and great good will come of it!

May the Lord grant to some of you, who are not meek, but the very reverse, that you may come under the touch of his renewing Spirit, and be born again! Then will you be capable of becoming truly meek, and then will God beautify you with his salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

-Extracted from "Beautiful for Ever" by
C.H. Spurgeon

The Witness of Beauty

Truth, goodness, and beauty. These three things are tools for glorifying Christ. Glorifying God and enjoying Him for ever is the main point of each of our lives. So we must learn how to use tools available to us to glorify Him. To point others to His truth, His goodness, and His beauty. Therefore, we must learn to love and teach others what is truly TRUTH. We must learn to love and teach others what is truly GOOD. We must learn to love and teach others what is truly BEAUTIFUL. Today Brother Matt wants us to consider Beauty.

I recently read a quote from the book, "Eve In Exile," that stated, "Beauty is a powerful and compelling force that draws people." This made me pause and think. Beauty is a force? And the more I considered it the more I realized how true it is and how beauty can be used to point others to Christ. God is often glorified to me in the beauty of nature. The perfection of a snowflake. The intricate beauty of an iris with colors blending together on a frilly petal. The sound of the creek babbling as it passes. The glory of a sunset. The sound of birds singing in spring. The smell of the rain and the sound of rolling thunder. The beauty of things like these speak to souls around the world and witness to us the wonders of God.

In the same way there are beautiful things in life that we alone can choose to make beautiful or ugly. There is beauty in a home that has been lovingly organized to provide the needs of eternal souls that walk through the door. The chair situated by the fire so the visitor can sit and enjoy the flames and the heat. The pot of coffee bubbling and the hot cup passed to someone who is cold and needs warmed up or who is tired and needs to wake up. The flowerbed that has been planned, planted, weeded and the bright colors that will pop out of it at the right time. The pumpkin and gourd patch that has been tilled and watered for months in preparation of tiny hands seeking out outrageous shapes and colors and designs straight from our Creator's imagination and the squeals of joy that follow. The cake whipped up in a kitchen and given away specifically to tickle tastebuds and silently says you are loved. Sweet letters and cards sent in love. A phone call out of the blue with a voice on the other end that says, "You were on my mind. How is God working

in your life right now?" The smell of dinner cooking and the sight of a place set at the table for eternal souls to feed physically on food and spiritually on fellowship. The smell of a clean shirt as it slips over your head. The sound of beautiful music quietly playing. The paycheck in the bank earned by hard work from someone willing to get up and do it all again, that will provide food on the table, clothes on the back, and a roof over the head of other souls. The sound of laughter between believers enjoying each other's company. The pitter patter of little feet running across the floor. The chubby face of a child that presents itself for a kiss and is confident it will receive one. Arms of a loved one giving a hug. The smile that is given not necessarily as a reflection of the heart of the giver but as a gift to the one it is being given too. The joy of getting to know a fellow believer. The sight of a bed made with the blankets turned down ready for a weary body to find rest. Heads bowed around the table giving thanks to God and a mama peeking and seeing little eyes scrunched tightly shut as they learn to pray. The sound of a child taking a turn to pray and listening to that little voice give thanks to our Lord. The sound of an adult's voice praying and giving thanks that sets the example for others. The notes of hymns being sung by a group who WANT to lift their voices together in worship. A Christian friendship that has lasted for years and where each can trust the other to always point them back to Christ. The child sitting in time-out because the parents love them so much they will repeatedly correct them and teach them the ways of God. Watching a child choose to be polite and kind after the 999,999th time of being corrected. A home filled with peace because during hard times God's ways are pursued. Truth being repeatedly spoken to another soul until that soul finally hears it. Knees bent and head bowed in prayer as a troubled soul trusts God with the trial that is out of their control. The sight of a family member with Bible opened and truth being read. The the deep sound of a man's voice reading scripture aloud and encouraging those listening to trust in God's ways. All of these things are simple but time consuming. All these things can be done but take effort by

someone to get them done. All of these things are beautiful when done in the name of Christ. All these things and many more are tiny pieces of beauty in life that can quietly point other eternal souls to Christ. Now go back through this list and come up with the opposite of these beautiful things and you will see ways to make life ugly.

During this time of Covid we have two ways to view the days in front of us. Either God has limited our ability to use the tool of beauty to glorify Him to others, or He has made it perfectly clear which eternal souls He wants each of us to focus on. We each have different circumstances, gifts, and people in our lives. We each have different ways to use this tool of beauty. Pray and ask God for wisdom about how He wants you to use this tool. Again I say, **beauty is a powerful and compelling force that draws people**. So I challenge you to join me to look for things at hand and redeem the time God has given you and make the next thing beautiful. Use the draw of beauty creatively in every part of your life. Make something lovely, make it beautiful, make it attractive. And when that's done ask God what you can work on next. And remember, the task He gives might not always be the task you would have chosen. Make it beautiful because He has asked you to.

-Jenny Williams

Beautiful Feet, Beautiful Name

How can the feet of followers of Jesus be beautiful? In Romans 10:15, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:6-7, "As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" In this passage, Isaiah writes about those "who publish salvation." In this passage, the English word "salvation" is in the original Hebrew the name of our Savior Jesus, "Yeshua!"

Why is the name of Jesus so beautiful? As Peter said in Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." In the most beautiful act of love anyone has ever done, Jesus became our salvation.

Paul wrote in Philippians 2:9, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name." Jesus is the most beautiful name and person there is - beautiful beyond imagination! Praise the beautiful name of Jesus and salvation through Him, wherever your feet may take you.

-Joe Council

Creativity, the Arts, and the Church

An Interview with Bruce Wade

As the Campus Missionary and Director of the Baptist Student Union at the Missouri S&T campus, Bruce Wade is on the front lines of reaching out and ministering to young adults in higher education. The Rolla campus is not known for its arts but for science and engineering. However, a university education requires an arts component so the students will be well-rounded in their outlook. Therefore, the arts are an important part of the campus experience. Here is an interview which Pastor Matt conducted with Bruce to get his perspective on the importance of creativity and the arts in our Christian faith.

Matt: Much of the Church seems to be disengaged from the arts. Do you believe this is the case? Why or why not?

Bruce: *First: We're probably talking about Evangelical churches (specifically SBC churches) in America. That being the case, I think the point is largely correct (certainly in the case of fine arts). I would distinguish between popular music (even worship music) and graphic illustrations versus finer expressions in the arts (musical compositions for instruments and choirs, paintings, theater, and architecture).*

I would suppose (without scientific data) that this may be due, in part, to our tendency toward the pragmatic borne from our frontier or mostly rural heritage. Most of our churches are smaller and don't have the resources to finance works of art. Some may see spending on fine arts as frivolous (while enjoying art that others have produced).

Second: On the other hand, some of what is called "fine art" today is anything but fine and few have the temerity to inform the emperor that his clothing is a lie. This has left a bad impression for the arts on some.

Matt: What do you believe are the ramifications of Christians disengaging from the arts?

Bruce: *God is our Creator. He has implanted His Creative nature—with a capital "C"—in humanity with a lower case "c". By this, I mean that we cannot actually create (ex nihilo), but we can reflect the Creator and teach about Him through the arts. Also, He created us to perceive His Greatness with all of our senses. This being the case, we need to communicate His Truth through all the senses. If we don't, we miss opportunities to fulfill the Great Commission. Is it just possible that beauty is not merely in the eye of the beholder, but something that reflects the Creator?*

Matt: Historically Christians took the artistic expression of their faith very seriously. I'm thinking of the paintings and sculptures of the Italian Renaissance, the work of Rembrandt, and music such as Handel's Messiah. What lessons do we learn from this history?

Bruce: *If you would indulge some sarcasm: it might point to the benefit of a powerful church benefactor who sells indulgences in order (in part) to finance the arts. But, to be serious, the population was largely illiterate in the dark ages and the arts pointed to God—making the renaissance even more important. Modern historians have tended to focus on the failing of some of these artists, but many were very devoted to Christ and were serving Him by creating works of various artistic expressions.*

These works of art and architecture pointed the worshiper to God—lifting the spirits, and the viewers' heads, as they took in the murals. The music could soothe and terrify in the different movements, taking the listener on an emotional journey as it became what we would call a sound track for the biblical stories they were telling. We would do well to encourage

committed artists to teach us of God's wonder through the arts today.

Matt: Many Christians do not believe themselves to be artistic. How can the faith of these brothers and sisters be enriched through their own creativity and that of others?

Bruce: *Honestly, not many will be professional artists in any medium. They're called "starving artists" for a reason. I believe, however, that many of our folks have within them the spark of the Creator. It may have been criticized at a young age, but it might revive if we give it a chance.*

At its best, creating artistic expression as a Christian is an individual act of worship that facilitates others' worship experiences. It is connecting with the Creator. It must not, however, be an end in itself. It must not be just another idol. Like so many professions, it is a tool to serve and worship God.

Matt: Lastly, what role can our creativity play in our worship of God?

Bruce: *I touched on that just a bit above. Drama, architecture, music, and paintings can all be employed to aid in our worship experiences. Drama and music illustrate the message a pastor is communicating. Paintings and a building's architecture help us to focus on why we've gathered.*

A Beautiful Blessing

Our church congregation
was very blessed.

A little voice stood out
above the rest.

We could hear it,

With much spirit;

"Bless the Lord, Oh my Soul!"
young Davey stressed.

-Ed Dunn

The Beauty of the Lord

When I consider the Lord and how wonderful He is I cannot help but be thankful. He is so good to us! He decided to make a world and fill it with beautiful things that come from the deep well of His wisdom. From the majesty of the snow capped mountains, to the tiniest worker ant, God has created everything with beauty. But He didn't stop there. He made beautiful people, formed in His image to carry His Glory out into the earth. How amazing are His thoughts on what beauty is!

Whether a son or a daughter, each child is special in their own unique way and the Lord blessed me with six of them, five daughters and a son. Growing up in a large family, I knew I wanted lots of children but why did the Lord bless me with so many "little women"? The vision in my mind was usually of a herd of boys, running in the yard playing and rough housing, not little girls in pretty dresses and bows. You see, growing up, I always identified with the boys easier. Playing in the mud, running through the woods, riding horses, and helping on the family farm was always my cup of tea. I didn't understand girls that spent time on their hair and makeup or enjoyed shopping for clothing. I saw little or no value in what I thought was needless primping when I was just going to get dirty anyways. Many times, I felt like a duck out of water when I was with other girls my age.

Things didn't improve much as I grew up. There was a longing in me to be feminine, to strive for beauty, but I didn't understand all the confusing emotions that came with the longing. My perception of femininity and beauty was someone who was fragile, helpless and consumed with looks. However, I had always been physically strong and capable of doing just about anything that needed done. I had trouble blending my perception of feminine with the person I already knew I was. As a young girl I rejected the thought of me being beautiful so intensely that it caused me to question God's wisdom in making me a girl. Many times I would cry hot tears of frustration because He didn't make me a boy. I just couldn't understand why I had been made a girl when I enjoyed doing anything but what girls enjoyed! When I started seeing my husband in high school, he was very happy that I liked all the "manly pursuits" as much as he did. We spent most of our dating years hunting, fishing, playing ball, and being outdoors as much as possible. His appreciation of me loving these activities seemed to be a confirmation that I was just a 'weird' woman and I wrongly resigned myself to the thought that I would never be like other women.

Thank God He doesn't leave us to our wrong thinking!

We got married after dating for five years and very quickly started having children. The first baby was a darling little girl. She was beautiful! Then quickly after, two more beautiful little ladies joined our family. Oh my, did they love princesses, pink dresses, dolls and dress up clothes! High heel shoes and sparkly accessories were adored and eagerly talked about at long lengths by my little girly girls. What I discovered in those moments of delighting in my daughter's enjoyment of beautiful things is the reason little girls so thoroughly enjoy all these things: God put it in them because it is in Him. Though it wasn't obvious to me outwardly, beauty was in me because of His presence living there.

When little girls grow up, they become women who are made in the image of a beautiful God and Savior. Every single one. God made men to be examples of His strength and power, leadership and courage. Women with their beauty and femininity, grace and resilience are examples of God and carry His attributes the same as their male counterparts. Each of those characteristics are unique and beautiful in their own way and are a necessity to carry out God's plan on the earth. The beauty of the Lord is displayed for all to see, especially in His chief creation, mankind. We can be very quick to give up on seeing the beauty because of the fallen world we live in right now. But God doesn't let us have an excuse. He has told us in His Word to focus on Him and we will see True Beauty. When we focus on the difficulties in life, on the sin that is all around, on our own shortcomings, we become bogged down and easy prey for Satan. Jesus has shown us a better way; look to the face of the Anointed One. He is the epitome of all that's admired and wanted, pure and graceful, majestic and strong, a shining diadem of God's Glory. Then, wonder of all wonders, He looked at us, the inhabitants of this world, God's lost children, and said, "I want you for my bride." How amazing! Where death reigned, He saw Life everlasting. Where filthy rags were the normal garb, He saw bridal white. Jesus saw the true beauty in spite of all the ugliness sin had caused. Our true beauty, true worth, is only found in beholding Him. When we turn our eyes to Him, we see ourselves in Him, but that's not all. When He looks at us, into the eyes of the children of God, He sees Himself; the Epitome of Beauty living inside you and me. Selah.

When a bride is walking down the aisle to her groom, she radiates under his gaze with an inner glow that is almost indescribable. Simply put, it is love, his love for his bride that causes

her to radiate beauty. It can be difficult to see ourselves in this way when it comes to our relationship with Christ, especially if we carry wrong thinking or a worldly point of view. I've had a difficult time of this myself because of preconceived thoughts or patterns that have been set in place for years. I have too often viewed His love for me as something based on my performance or how I measured up compared to others. When I was younger, I always fell short of feeling that my type of beauty was appreciated and I would unsuccessfully try to fit into a mold that was not me. Thankfully I found that His Love is pure and undefiled, spiritual and eternal, based on an appreciation of who we are in Him. "For God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

God had a plan that the beauty of mankind, whether male or female, would be the outflow of Him in us, and that beauty would be used to point others to the Son, Jesus. All the power and glory, beauty and grace, the presence and majesty, balance and uniqueness, creatively combined in people by the Father for His Glory. God has called us to think His thoughts, walk in His ways, and to live life as His children. As His beautiful children it is our privilege to show others His beauty, His charm and His appreciation for who they are. What a wonderful job assignment! When we see ourselves from His point of view, we are able to see the whole picture. "I was lost but now I'm found. I was a sinner but now I'm saved by grace. I was dirty rags but now I'm righteous in Him. I was blind but now I see."

We can now grasp true appreciation of beauty because of Him. Now our softened hearts can grasp true appreciation for others beauty and worth and love them like He loves us. Love and Beauty intertwined for His Glory.

Even after all this, it's still not easy to see myself as beautiful in the Lord, but He is faithful to mature me in my thinking. He has used my children many times to teach me eternal truths about beauty. After the first three daughters, two more came, with a son dropped in the middle. To me, they are all beautiful because their beauty comes from the inside out and only enhances what they already had on the exterior. They don't need to be perfect for me to love them and appreciate their uniqueness. Through this thought, God has shown me that this is the way He thinks of me. Whether digging in the garden with dirty hands or going shopping for shoes it makes no difference. He knows what's on the inside and to Him it's beautiful.