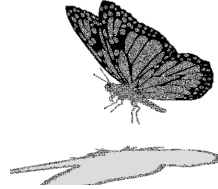


## **CHASING AFTER BEAUTY**



*Scripture:*

**Philippians 4:8-9**

8. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
9. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.

**Romans 8:28-30**

28. We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.
29. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren.
30. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.



### **ZEPHYR POINT**

A few weeks ago, I had the delightful experience of taking some time off from work and luxuriating in the amazing opportunity to spend a week banging my shins on rocks, hitting my head on low-hanging branches, falling down, losing my glasses, inadvertently slipping into some of the coldest water known to humankind, and one day being discovered by some poor soul talking on a cell-phone who looked upon me with horror, believing I had fallen on the rocks and suffered serious injury. I was fine, actually. It was just another day at the photography workshop I attended at Zephyr Point.

Here is what the typical day looked like. We would get up every morning, gather after breakfast and listen to the leader fill our minds with all manner of ideas and concepts. He talked about composition, light and color, implied motion in a photograph, texture, depth of field, points of entry, the way the human eye moves when it investigates a photo and more. Then we would go out and shoot for most of the day if we wanted. After necessary first aid and maybe a change into dry clothes, we would get back together again to view our work, share impressions, analyze, critique and share ideas about how the photo in question might be improved. Ideas of what to try tomorrow filled my head each night until

morning came and we got up eager to do it all over again.

## **AWESOME WONDER**

After about three days of this it suddenly hit me. What an incredible privilege this was -- to spend as many hours as I could each day learning about beauty, thinking about beauty, and most exciting of all, chasing after beauty. It became a sacred quest, and songs written on the heart came springing forth, "O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds thy hands have made ..." This tree, this flower, this ripple on the water, this graceful bird in flight, this first light, this sunset, this rock, this cloud, and every shadow, every reflection, every color and every texture that adorns creation! "O Lord, My God what beauty!"

## **AN ACT OF WORSHIP**

Each moment of standing behind the camera began to feel like an act of worship. I would survey the expanse of God's creation, raise the camera to compose, letting it back down again to behold the greater splendor; ever moving this way and that, up and down, to the side, forward, back, sometimes sprawled on the rocks on my back. I worked the camera adjustments and settings -- aperture open or closed? Shutter speed fast or slow? Waiting for the lighting, color and contrast to be just so, focusing painstakingly on as many things that make for beauty that I could think of, not in the interest of creating a thing of beauty but merely of capturing at least some of the beauty that God has already set before us. It truly was an act of worship. Who could look at such beauty and not sing praises and thanksgiving?

## **WHOLLY FOCUSED ON BEAUTY**

It can change your life, chasing after beauty. Imagine yourself wholly absorbed, wholly focused on beauty. Take your time with it. Really get a hold of something that is beautiful for you and focus on it with the single purpose of merely beholding it.

And while focusing on beauty, focusing on it exclusively, consider this: How could you be afraid when you are focusing on beauty? How could you worry about tomorrow, or even about today for that matter? How could you know anger? Jealousy? Envy? Aggression? Defensiveness? Hopelessness? If you're staying with beauty, holding it close, holding tight not to let go, aren't mind and spirit captivated by other things -- things like awe, joy, wonder, lightness of heart, freedom, deep appreciation and profound gratitude, even love?

Is it any wonder that the Apostle Paul would commend to us this chasing after beauty: "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise think about these things."

**Chase after beauty  
and it will change your life.**

## **LEAVING THE MOUNTAIN-TOP EXPERIENCE**

Chasing beauty sounds easy enough. Trouble is, when we set our hearts on chasing beauty every day, it doesn't take long to wake up one day and discover that we are not at a photography workshop at

Lake Tahoe. We might wish we were. “Oh Lord my God, I want to stay at Lake Tahoe for another day of awesome wonder, please.” But we cannot. We return to a world where we don’t have to do much more than push a button in order to behold abundant, despair-inducing ugliness in the world.

## **IMAGES OF UGLINESS**

We’ve had quite a time in the Gulf Coast, haven’t we? Images of ugliness abound. Who knows how many times your eyes saw that pipe spewing forth Black Death at an unbelievable rate for days and days and days, mocking not only beauty but life itself. Images unfolded day by day: the destruction to the wetlands, the oil-smothered dead and dying wildlife, oil on the water, oil in the water, oil seemingly everywhere in quantities beyond comprehension. This and far more is offered up to us in a non-stop display of frank ugliness. It is with a much different tone of voice that we now lament, “Oh my Lord, O my God.”

## **BUT BEAUTY WAS THERE TOO**

Yet even in an overabundance of ugliness, beauty was there. There were the hands of volunteers and workers laboring valiantly to wash the oil from birds and animals otherwise facing certain death. Those caring hands were a thing of beauty. There were men, women and children patrolling damaged areas of shoreline, painstakingly removing tar balls from white sandy beaches. Their gift of time and energy was a thing of beauty. There were fishermen crying out, “Put us to work cleaning up this mess!” Their passion to preserve and protect something of beauty is a thing of beauty in itself. And we enjoyed tastes of victory if we were lucky enough to catch them—images of restored beaches and

animals cleaned up, nourished back to health and then released. There is beauty in all of these things.

**Beauty is found in the midst of ugliness and thus bears witness to what is true: “In all things, God works for good.” Beauty is a sign that God is there working for good.**

So what are we to do? Let’s go back to the Gulf Coast for a minute.

## **VARIED REACTIONS**

What was your reaction to all of that black crude oil so dramatically set before us? Seeing that pipe gush an enormous quantity of oil day after day, I finally got to the point of being physically nauseated by the sight of it. I just couldn’t watch any longer.

But others watched. Some of those who kept on watching stayed focused on the ugliness of what they saw. They drew energy from the ugliness and engaged in a destructive game of blaming, scapegoating and faultfinding. They made a lot of noise and created much bad will among people but in the end, accomplished little else.

There were yet others who kept beholding the ugliness but rather than react to the ugliness, they kept searching for something else. They were looking for something good, something right, to their eyes, beautiful. They were looking for ways to build on what strength they did see. They tried a number of things to contain the flow and early attempts failed. Still, they kept on looking for what was right, what was sound, what was good and could form the basis for a new plan. It took a long while, but in the

end, these people ultimately found a way to stop the leak. I would say they did it by focusing not on what was wrong but on what was right. In other words, they chased after beauty.

### **SEARCH FOR BEAUTY IN THE MIDST OF UGLINESS AND DESPAIR**

And that is what I hear in our readings today, a call to live life chasing after beauty. Chase after beauty as if your life depended on it. It does. And search for beauty everywhere; especially search in the midst of ugliness and despair. Beauty, once found, is where God is working, and where you and I are lovingly called to care. Look around you, look within you, chase after beauty and follow it everywhere. There you will find God bringing joy and hope, healing and peace, bringing life even from the depths of despair. For hope and promise and the blessing of inspiration, let us join our hearts in prayer.



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