

## Wisdom in Relating to Beauty

Series: Wisdom for Life (Proverbs)

Brad Bailey – August 5, 2018

Genesis 2:7

Genesis 2:9

*And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.*

Romans 1:21-23, 25

*"... although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. ... They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator..."*

Proverbs 5:15-19

*Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.*

*Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares?*

*Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.*

*May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.*

*A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.*

Proverbs 11:22

*Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.*

Proverbs 31:30

*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

1. Beauty is meant to serve the joining of our physical and \_\_\_\_\_ nature... that of body and \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Beauty's outer nature can become \_\_\_\_\_ with the deeper nature of beauty we long for.

3. Beauty should be sought at the \_\_\_\_\_ level... for the \_\_\_\_\_ goodness it represents.

1 Peter 3:3-4 (AMP)

*Your adornment must not be merely external—with interweaving and elaborate knotting of the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or [being superficially preoccupied with] dressing in expensive clothes; but let it be [the inner beauty of] the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality and unfading charm of a gentle and peaceful spirit, [one that is calm and self-controlled, not overanxious, but serene and spiritually mature] which is very precious in the sight of God.*

Isaiah 53:2-3 (GW)

He grew up in his presence like a young tree, like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that would make us look at him. He had nothing in his appearance that would make us desire him.

He was despised and rejected by people. He was a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering. He was despised like one from whom people turn their faces, and we didn't consider him to be worth anything.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NLT)

Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.

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### Intro

We are continuing in our series entitled “Wisdom for Life.” Many describe our current culture as awash in knowledge but lost for wisdom. That is... we have access now to an overload of information... but are lack wisdom. Wisdom is defined best as the ability to know how life actually works...and what is the right response to the many choices we make. When given a choice to ask God for anything.... King Solomon of Israel ask God for wisdom...and it is that wisdom and more that made it's way into the Biblical Book of Proverbs. So, we are drawing upon the Book of Proverbs to allow divine wisdom to speak to us.

**To appreciate what God has to speak to us today...** I think it will be helpful to ask a few questions. These questions are not meant to answer out loud... but to yourself. So let me ask us to consider four questions...and give a moment to allow us to ponder each of them.

- 1. Can you imagine something you find beautiful?**
- 2. Can you imagine a world without beauty?**
- 3. Can you think of how beauty can become vain?**
- 4. Are you beautiful?**

By reflecting on those 4 questions.. I believe we can **begin to consider ...our relationship to beauty.**

We experience beauty as such a **positive part of life...so much a part that it is almost hard to imagine a world without elements of beauty.**

But it's not hard to **also sense the vanity that our relationship to beauty can bring.**  
And most of us at some level... feel quietly uncertain of being associated with beauty.

Today ... hear **God's wisdom for relating to beauty.**

**We may not think about how we relate to the nature of beauty...** but it is a **profound and powerful part of our lives.** Beauty speaks of all that we find pleasing to see and hear.. and how it effects us.

To appreciate the wisdom pf Proverbs... I want to help us grasp what the Scriptures tell us about the most fundamental nature of beauty.

### Genesis 2:7 (NIV)

*The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

When God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (v. 7), God was not only portraying man's total dependence but also showing His desire for a relationship with man. The Hebrew word for “being” is also translated as “soul”...and is linked to the throat or the neck and accordingly has the connotation of desire, hunger, appetite, and

longing. It is the same word used when the Psalmist declares: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul [nephesh] for You, O God” (Ps. 42:1). [1]

**Our living nature is a nature that longs... that seeks a satisfaction that lies in God. We were created with a connection to the ultimate source of all beauty and good.**

Then we read...

**Genesis 2:9 (NIV)**

*And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.*

That little phrase... “pleasing to the eye” implies something we shouldn’t miss. God created a world in which His provision was not only practical... “good for food”...but included a sensory pleasure. It brought pleasure to the eye. And I think it is safe to say that it brought taste and touch. In other words... we were created to have a sensory relationship that is pleasing... that has an internal response to what we see, taste, touch, hear.

It speaks of His glory...His goodness. The ultimate goodness of God’s nature is manifest in the sensory pleasure... the beauty. One is not just thankful for the provision that fulfills their appetite...but can be thankful for pleasing experience with what we might call it’s beauty.

**But something happened to that connection...to that relationship with beauty.** This is how it is described later in the Scriptures, when the Apostle Paul, in the Book of Romans states...

Romans 1:21-23, 25 (NIV)

*“... although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. ... They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator...”*

We ascribed the greater glory... the greater good... to creation itself.  
And notice what this is described as.

***“Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools...”***

The way we relate to the manifestation of beauty... giving to the objects of beauty what is not ultimately about them... may be something we think is wise...but is actually foolish... it’s actually our fundamental problem. Wisdom is understanding how life really works. And **the tragedy of our foolishness... is relating to the creation as if it were the end in itself.**

Let me try to summarize it this way:

*God formed the human soul with senses to engage beauty...but when the physical pleasure is separated from the deeper good... it becomes vain.*

*Unconnected from the ultimate source of beauty and goodness...we relate to the objects of beauty as if they were the end in themselves...and the related pleasure will never connect us to the deeper beauty and good they relate to.*

**Out of this reality... two general responses have formed.**

One is to a fear of the power of being sensual being... a fear that leads to repression. If one feels that they are driven now by physical desires that are destructive and dishonoring of God's intent... they may look upon the sensual nature itself as an evil... or to the objects of desire as dangerous at best...and inherently evil at worst. It has caused fear of all pleasure... curtail the arts... to despise one's own sexuality...and with this... men have feared and oppressed women. This is the response of repression and inhibition.

The other response has been one of indulgence. It tries to ignore any problem with pleasure...and glorifies the secondary and short-term sensory pleasure as an end in itself. The source of pleasure and beauty now controls life...and the result is becoming addicts to its control...and insecure to its ideals.

**But wisdom of the Proverbs speaks of how neither the inhibited nor the indulgent leads to a healthy relationship to beauty.**

I want to begin with a **passage related to sexual desires...** because it reflects the **most intense nature of sensuality.**

As we've noted in previous weeks...the **Book of Proverbs** was likely developed for **teaching wisdom to young men.**

That's why you have the **preponderance of references to men and young men** and "your wife" and there's no addressing of women.

But it's not difficult to understand the relationship to both men and women.

Speaking into marriage... and particularly the power of sexual desire...

**Proverbs 5:15-19 (NIV)**

*Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.*

*Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares?*

*Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.*

*May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.*

*A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.*

It's important for us to hear the rather surprising affirmation of sensuality. [2]

Verse 15: **"Drink water from your own cistern, your well."** Now the cistern and the well in Hebrew poetry was an image for female sexuality. You have to enter into the cistern. It's an **image of female sexuality.** On the other hand, in verse 18, we have, **"May your fountain be**

**blessed.”** This isn’t water you go down in to get; this is water that spurts out. This is an **image of male sexuality**, a very vivid image of male sexuality.

It’s neither prude... nor crude. It simply sees the beauty ...the goodness...of being physical beings... with the potential of physical pleasure. Do you hear the fear? No. It’s not prude in that way. But do you hear the dehumanizing machine like indulgence? No it’s not crude in that way.

Then you get to verse 19. **“May your wife’s breasts satisfy your desires, and may you ever be captivated by her love.”** (This is in the Bible, by the way.)

What’s this saying to the young man to whom it was initially providing wisdom for? It tells them that there is a God-given gift of beauty that should be enjoyed... but it defines the goodness as integrating the physical and the personal. It speaks of the ability to be satisfied by her breasts...and captivated by her love. It’s a **connection** between the **physical** and the **personal**.

Notice verse 16 calls out the foolishness of lacking such a connection: “Should your springs overflow in the streets, and streams of water in the public squares?” He’s speaking to the male’s sexuality... and saying that this is not something that can work in a disconnected way. He’s saying casual sex is out. Sex with people outside marriage is out.

**What do we have here?** And incredible **integration** of our **physical** and **personal** nature.

So the first point we can make is this....

**1. Beauty is meant to serve the joining of our physical and personal nature... that of body and being.**

**Our problem is not that of sensuality in itself... but of the separation between the outward and the inward.**

Over the recent decades, sociologists have talked about something that’s often called commodification. “Commodification is a process by which social relations are reduced to economic exchange relations.” What’s all that about? An economic exchange relation is a consumer/vendor relationship. A consumer only stays in a relationship with a vendor if the product comes to you at a cost that’s acceptable.

Now throughout history, social relationships were not run on the same basis. They were not consumer-based. Social relations were commitment-based. Your relationships with your neighbors, with your friends, certainly with your family, with your children, with your spouse, were commitment-based relationships.

Why? Well, in a social relationship that’s **commitment-based**, the **relationship is an end in itself**. You stay in the relationship whether it’s meeting your individual needs or not. Even though, of course, that can be costly at times, all cultures have always understood a life filled

with only consumer relationships is a lonely life, and a life filled with commitment relationships is the most fulfilling and rich and happy life possible.

What **observers have been noticing** about our **modern culture for the last few years**, though (and they're absolutely right about it), is that **commodification, the model of the market, is now being applied by so many people in our society to more and more of our relationships** so that almost all of our relationships now are consumer-based rather than commitment-based.

**Wisdom says never commodify sex.... Never separate the physical and personal.**

**And this speaks more widely to our relationship with beauty. Beauty was meant to lead beyond it's own end to the goodness it reflects. As C.S. Lewis wrote...**

***"We do not want merely to see beauty... we want something else which can hardly be put into words- to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it."* - C.S. Lewis**

And the second point which I believe we can hear from this divine wisdom is this...

**2. Beauty's outer nature can become falsely associated with the deeper nature of beauty we long for.**

**The danger lies in outward beauty separated from the deeper beauty that satisfies.**

Don't become inappropriately attached to what is only the secondary beauty... the ...shadow. If you try to make the form of beauty your primary source of goodness... it will never satisfy.

**III – I recall my first year at college... San Diego State...walking around college campus...**

laughing to myself as I seemed to fall in love every day...and realized it was with the smile of some cute girl. I was falling in love with a smile. A smile is great... but only as a symbol of what it conveys... which is warmth. I was projecting what I associated with a smile because it elicited something positive... but the truth of the reality... is that it wasn't a truth that may be rooted in the nature of the person.

So it is with every facet of beauty.

The nature of beauty... is that the eye connects... it sets something off... a desire... a draw... and what **wisdom is telling us** is **not that** it is **depraved**...but rather that the connection can be **deceptive**.

Some of you may remember learning about **Pavlov's dog**.

During the 1890s, Russian physiologist, Ivan Pavlov was looking at salivation in dogs in response to being fed when he noticed that his dogs would begin to salivate whenever he entered the room, even when he was not bringing them food. At first, this was something of a nuisance (not to mention messy!). SO he further study and discovered the power of association.

In his experiment, Pavlov used a bell as his neutral stimulus. Whenever he gave food to his dogs, he also rang a bell. After a number of repeats of this procedure, he tried the bell on its own. As you might expect, the bell on its own now caused an increase in salivation.

This captures the power of association... of correlation... of developing a deep connection to what is only correlated. The dog had a feeling elicited ...even when his true appetite and need was not satisfied. [3]

Our current culture may try to scoff at the idea... may want to commodify sex... as simply a product to meet an appetite.

But in truth we are far more deceived that we think. We are far more like Pavlov's dogs... we here a bell and salivate even when the deeper satisfaction is never met.

**When we turn sex and beauty into a commodity...we are overtaken by addiction and insecurity.**

**So wisdom tells the young man... you can be satisfied with the breasts of your wife... when you are captivated by her love.**

If you become conditioned to associate some other breasts...some other body with your longings... you will never be satisfied.

We need the wisdom to understand that beauty's outer nature can become falsely associated with the deeper nature of beauty we long for.

So further in Proverbs we read...

### **Proverbs 11:22**

*Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.*

Now... **I understand** that **if you are a woman...** this **might not seem a very kind** description. It **may seem to suggest** that **women are shallow.**

But it's actually speaking to the potentially foolish nature of men. For it's men who can become so captivated by the gold ring that they don't notice a pig. It's speaking of the way in which we can foolishly see outer appearance and not see the lack of deeper beauty that can't satisfy.

When you see a **beautiful ring like that**, you just want to reach out and grab it, and you pull it to yourself. But if it is attached inextricably and inseparably to a pig that rolls around in the dirt and mud, then when you pull the ring to yourself and you don't notice the pig, suddenly you have this rather big mess at hand.

We might think, "What idiot would do that?"

The answer is... we all do. We are constantly caring about appearance over character... outward beauty more than inner beauty.

And really that is the nature of outward beauty...and initial impressions. So, further in this Book of Wisdom... the writer speaks of the woman of virtue...and notes...

### **Proverbs 31:30**

*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

**Charm...** it can be a very positive natural quality... but it can also reflect how someone can **work our feelings... like a salesman** who may be **telling you** what you want to hear for the purpose of **selling you** something you don't need.

**And beauty... while it is a positive part of life...we should never forget that** earthly beauty is going to have limits over time. Every human body is aging. Every tree will wither in time. Every powerful song will lose it's fresh dynamic over time.

So what will help us connect to what will last? The virtuous one is the one who fears the Lord. This is not referring to the fear of one who seeks to harm...but the realization that another is the true center source and center of all ultimate life. The fearing of the Lord is a matter of caring and honoring the One whose goodness is true and lasting. It refers to one whose soul is rooted in the glory and goodness of God... because it is greater than the glory of anyone or anything.

This naturally leads to the third point...

### **3. Beauty should be sought at the deeper level... for the ultimate goodness it represents.**

Have you ever seen something that was so GOOD that you said...that's beautiful?

Perhaps you left a movie...and said... "That was beautiful"...and you were speaking about the story. Perhaps there was the way someone cared for another person...and you said... "That was beautiful." It is not speaking about any physical appearance. It is speaking of the beautiful nature of the inner goodness at hand.

God is described as beautiful... in Scriptures...in worship. That is perhaps the most powerful way of capturing that beauty at what we might call it's most complete or purest level...is not physical at all. [4]

So wisdom is that which understands that God never entirely dismisses physical beauty... but he sees the reality that the most valuable beauty... is not physical.

In the Scriptures Peter wrote [5]...

#### **1 Peter 3:3-4 (AMP)**

*Your adornment must not be merely external—with interweaving and elaborate knotting of the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or [being superficially preoccupied with] dressing in expensive clothes; but let it be [the inner beauty of] the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality and unfading charm of a gentle and peaceful spirit, [one that is calm and self-controlled, not overanxious, but serene and spiritually mature] which is very precious in the sight of God.*



I imagine that some women will hear this and sense that it seems a bit unfair...because they live in the constant message of needing to be beautiful outwardly... and invest so much in their appearance. So this may sound like just adding another ideal.

But I believe that it is a liberating appeal.

**Psychologists will tell you ...one of the reasons we're obsessed with beauty ...** Either *I* need to be beautiful or I need to be *with* the beautiful. One of the reasons psychologists say we're so obsessed with outward beauty is we don't like what's inside. We know we don't like what's inside. There's a shame, or there's a guilt, or there's a feeling like I haven't lived up. If I'm really great-looking on the outside, or if I'm really with somebody who's great-looking, then somehow that feels like it covers the unsightliness on the inside. [6]

### **CONCLUSION:**

God has come to establish our ultimate beauty from the inside out.

You may know or recall that the Scriptures had described the coming of a savior long ago. This is what Jesus fulfilled. And this is what was described.

### **Isaiah 53:2-3 (GW)**

*He grew up in his presence like a young tree, like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that would make us look at him. He had nothing in his appearance that would make us desire him.*

*He was despised and rejected by people. He was a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering. He was despised like one from whom people turn their faces, and we didn't consider him to be worth anything.*

When God wanted to rescue us... he came without that which we so falsely become attracted and attached to... yet he bore the truest of beauty and goodness.

The one who bears ultimate beauty comes without any physical appearance we associate with beauty.

The One who is forever blessed...comes with everything we associate with being blessed.

Why would he come like that? What could be the reason that our Creator tells us that our Savior will come intentionally without any of what we correlate or associate with beauty or blessing?

Jesus Christ was beautiful. He had all the glory, but he emptied himself of his beauty and came to earth to die for our sins. He came into a world that's obsessed with power, and he had no power; with beauty, and he had no beauty; with credentials, and he had no credentials. So we cast him aside. We rejected him. We killed him. Why?

To break the illusion that the outward physical beauty is the ultimate beauty and goodness. He came to break the spell that has been upon us.

He broke the spell.... Not as one who was deploring our sensual nature...but as the one who was freeing us from the spell of deception... and it's vanity.

He comes not to take anything from the physical and sensual beauty of his world...but to restore the true beauty of ultimate goodness....to restore the true beauty that we were created to have.

Paul says so in Ephesians 5.

**Ephesians 5:25-27 (NLT)**

*Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.*

He has come to restore the ultimate beauty we were created to bear.

He has come to break the spell. To free us from our addiction to associations that enslave us. He has come to break the spell in our relationship to beauty that leaves us only insecure.

**Closing Prayer**

**Notes:**

1. Genesis 2:7 - As described by Stuart Briscoe in the Preacher's Commentary (Briscoe, D. S., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1987). Genesis (Vol. 1, p. 39). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson)

2. Descriptions of sexuality in Proverbs 5 drew from Tim Keller's teaching : "The Temptation of Beauty" (October 24, 2004)

3. The same thing is used in television ads. It is assumed that if some unconditioned stimulus like a beautiful girl, attractive image or valued lifestyle is associated with a brand, it will become a conditioned stimulus, which makes consumers think positive about an advertised brand. (O'Shaughnessy, 2004)

For example, BMW M3 "Full of Soul" TV advertisement. Where conditional stimulus is expressed as a sexual relationship between men and women. Watching advertisement we make our associations in the middle of stimuli in adverts, or implications about positive and negative reinforcement, which affect how we respond to adverts. We learn through responding to reward/avoiding punishment. We can assume that this BMW advertisement using sexual relationship as a reward when buying their brand cars. - BMW M3 // Full of Soul -

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=30&v=b\\_v5fPI-DUw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=30&v=b_v5fPI-DUw)

4. The Bible speaks of God's beauty...

Psalm 27:4 "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."

Isaiah 28:5 "In that day the Lord of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people."

Isaiah 33:17 "Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty; they will see a land that stretches afar."

5. We read similarly of God looking inwardly in 1 Samuel 16:7

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

6. Drawn from Tim Keller’s teaching : “The Temptation of Beauty” (October 24, 2004)