

Thinking Christianly Part Six: Beauty

I. God the Artist

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech; they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

- Psalm 19:1-4

The skies say something of the glory of God that I, in my words, in my speech, never could. They paint. They splash colour and light. They flash. The "pour forth" words that no words could ever say.

"If I could have said it, I wouldn't have had to dance it." – Anna Pavlova, Ballet dancer

II. Art as a Means of Truth-Telling

"Art *suggests*, and suggestions are helpful in a way that sheer facts, or widely agreed interpretations, or tightly constructed arguments are not. The way forward in thinking often relies heavily on "what if" and "maybe," along with what is self-evident or incontrovertible."

– John Stackhouse Jr., *Need to Know*

"Art is getting across indefinable, but inescapable meaning." - Arthur C. Danto

Consider how a piece of music could be described, but that description could never "do" or "say" what the music itself communicates.

"At a reverent performance of music, God is always at hand with his gracious presence."

– J.S. Bach, margin notes in his Bible at 2 Chronicles 5:13

III. The Creative Endeavor

And we are called, as humans, as those who bear the image of the Creator God, into the important work of 'creating' and expressing the truth in creative ways.

Interestingly, many of the greatest scientific breakthroughs originated through the highly imaginative bringing together of seemingly unrelated things. When Albert Einstein considered his theories of relativity, he famously thought about trains and light beams. He said, in an interview about his intuition:

"I am enough of the artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."

– Albert Einstein

As people who follow the One who is the “Way, the Truth, and the Life” our vocation, our calling, is to speak truthfully, and that will include this getting across indefinable, but inescapable meaning.

“The artist is no more, and no less, than a contemplative who has learned to tell his love in colour, speech, or sound.... mediating between Reality and the human race.”

- Evelyn Underhill

IV. Beauty as a “Pointer” to God

“All of us are meaning-seekers. We approach every painting, novel, film, symphony, or ballet unconsciously hoping it will move us one step further on the journey toward answering the question ‘Why am I here?’ People living in the... [secular] world, however, are faced with an excruciating dilemma. Their hearts long to find ultimate meaning, while at the same time their critical minds do not believe it exists. We are homesick but have no home. So, we turn to the arts and aesthetics to satisfy our thirst for the Absolute. But if we want to find our true meaning in life, our search cannot end there. Art or beauty is not the destination; it is a signpost pointing toward our desired destination.” – Ian Morgan Cron, *Chasing Francis*

“The books or music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust in them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through was a longing...they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.”

– C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

V. Beauty as Evidence for God

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse” - Romans 1:20

“Here the challenge is to the unbeliever, to find a non-theistic register in which to respond to them, without impoverishment.” – Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*

“You can’t, except in the lowest animal sense, be in love with a girl if you know (and keep on remembering) that all the beauties both of her person and of her character are a momentary and accidental pattern produced by the collision of atoms, and that your own response to them is only a sort of psychic phosphorescence arising from the behavior of your genes. You can’t go on getting very serious pleasure from music if you know and remember that its air of significance is a pure illusion, that you like it only because your nervous system is irrationally conditioned to like it.” – C.S. Lewis, *On Living in an Atomic Age*

“Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of heavenly lights.” - James 1:17

“For now, we can only see a dim and blurry picture of things, as when we stare into polished metal. I realize that everything I know is only part of the big picture. But one day, *when Jesus*

arrives, we will see clearly, face-to-face. In that day, I will fully know just as I have been wholly known by God." – 1 Corinthians 13:12 (The Voice)

Life Group Discussion and Reflection Questions

Open Up: Describe a time when you had an experience of beauty – in the natural world, or through a human artwork – that moved you deeply. Why was that so meaningful to you?

Dig In:

1. **Read Psalm 19.** In what ways have you experienced the glories of God through the skies?
2. The first portion of the Psalm speaks of God's words through the natural world and the second about God's words through the "law", or God's instructions through Scripture. Why do you think we need both?
3. **Read and discuss the following quote:** *"The books or music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust in them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through was a longing...they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited."* – C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*
What warnings or challenge or encouragement comes to you through this quote?
4. The Psalms offer a guide for our own prayer life, using poetic imagery and language to speak to our often-messy lives and to bring God back into the centre of it. What would it look like for you to make a regular habit of praying through the Psalms?

Prayer:

Take some time to pray for any needs of the group. Take time to thank God for his beauty, and for speaking truthfully to us through the means of his creation, through music, through story, through dance and film.