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Awakening to Beauty

Today, I'd like to invite you to a conversation about beauty. What images come to mind when you hear the word beauty? Sunset? Movie stars? We often perceive beauty as 'in the eye of the beholder,' a purely subjective concept that depends on personal taste or cultural conditioning. In our modern world, beauty has been reduced to mere prettiness, focusing on surface-level aesthetics that appeal to the eye but may not nourish the soul.

Once I believed that social responsibility was one thing, and enjoying nature or poetry was entirely different. I understood the obligation to the public world, but I didn't realize how my distorted mental habits would mirror the world around me, whether I liked it or not.

Protestant Reformers were suspicious of beauty and stripped beauty out of churches and of faith. Our times have disenchanted beauty. The world of beauty was exchanged with a capitalist preoccupation with profitability and efficiency. John O'Donohue argues that the crisis we are enduring can be understood in relation to this indifference to beauty.

What if beauty isn't just a luxury or a pleasant addition to life, but rather an essential nourishment for our spirit? Is this idea something new to you? **Ancient wisdom says that God makes us for beauty, and out of beauty. If we disconnect from that, then we disconnect from our essence.** We can notice this idea is true, because we are very naturally attracted by beauty such as simple beauty of nature, a poem, or music, etc. It is so spontaneous in us. It is because we are created to be attracted to beauty.

As Wendy Farley says in her work 'Beguiled by Beauty,' true beauty calls to us from a deeper place; it opens the door through contemplation and communions with the divine. Today, we'll explore how to awaken to this deeper understanding of beauty, which guides us to the creation's truth.

We humans are created for beauty. Scripture reveals a profound truth that many of us have forgotten. **Just as our bodies need food and water to survive, our spirits need beauty to thrive. Beauty isn't a luxury; it's essential nourishment for the soul.** We need not only bread, but also roses. Beauty is gift to us from the creator; the most thriving, beautiful, and harmonious vital aspects of creation.

Think about those moments when you've been stopped in your life by something beautiful—a sunrise that painted the sky with impossible colors, music that seemed to express what words could not, or an act of kindness that revealed goodness at the heart of humanity. In those moments, didn't you feel more alive, more connected, and more aware of the sacred dimension of existence?

The 19th-century poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote that 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God.' Beauty is how we experience that charge, that divine electricity running through all things. When we encounter beauty, we're not just having an aesthetic experience.

—we're being nourished by divine presence. We were made to be fed by beauty, to be drawn by it into deeper communion with God and with all creation. When we lose touch with beauty, we lose touch with an essential aspect of our humanity and our spirituality.

In our fast-paced, productivity-driven lives, many of us are starved for beauty. We rush through life, missing the grandeur surrounding us. Anxiety consumes us, preventing us from experiencing wonder. Consequently, our spirits suffer from this malnourishment.

BEAUTY SUSTAINS LIFE IN THE MIDST OF OPPRESSION

Beauty of God nourishes and sustains human life, but it can be diminished by human assault and destruction. Even in the degraded by the oppression and dehumanized place, beauty can birth everywhere. For example, let's think about Jazz or Blues, the songs we love so much. They came out of such deep suffering. The haunting beauty of spirituals emerged from lives of utter degradation.

Slaves were assaulted in the most heinous way; without music, they couldn't survive. They created beauty even in the most desperate situations. The music of the enslaved community, spirituals, laid the foundation for genres like the Blues, Gospel, and Jazz. This beautiful music doesn't mean that oppression is okay because oppression brought something beautiful. No! Rather, it means that there was some unbelievable power within these people to not be totally defeated. In the haunting minor keys of the Blues, in the improvisational freedom of Jazz, we hear both the cry of suffering and the insistence on human dignity and creativity that cannot be extinguished. They were expressions of lament, resistance, and hope in the face of brutality.

When we fall in love with the world, we are not only captivated by the beauty of the sunset but also the beauty of being, creations of God. When our hearts are open to its beauty, we are invited to protect, care for, and lament for the world.

When we understand beauty in this way, we begin to see it not as an escape from the world's pain, but as a resource for engaging that pain with courage and hope. Beauty becomes not a distraction from suffering, but a way of bearing witness to the sacred worth of all that suffers. Wendy H. expresses this as Beauty's twin sister is compassion.

WHAT IS A BEAUTIFUL AND FULFILLED LIFE?

As a human being, we need meaning and the touch of God for fulfilling lives. People want to come to God in their best state and do their best to be perfect before God. Will that be possible? Unfortunately, it is not possible. Why? Because it is illusion. We are all broken vessels. Not one person is whole. Only Jesus is a perfect human being. When we open our brokenness to God, God heals the brokenness. God fills the crack of the vessel with gold and light.

Our God is healing God. Today's Psalm 147 states, 'Praise the LORD!... He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds... The LORD lifts up the downtrodden. "Not only that! Listen, "He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure." Our Divine

Father works on a cosmic scale. We can't move our hearts into that larger scale at all. And he knows our brokenness and heals us with divine tenderness. How magnificent and how intimate is our God! The same God who names each star binds up our wounds. The same God who makes grass grow on the hills, lifts those who have been cast down. Here, beauty isn't just about what pleases the eye, but about the wholeness of creation and the restoration of what has been broken.



We are all broken. The world is broken; many things are heartbreakingly broken. We want to hide our brokenness. If you have the courage to acknowledge the brokenness and bring it to God, the golden patch begins. God fills the cracks with gold. Creation is renewed. It is like the Japanese art of broken pottery. The cracks are filled with gold. Cracks are not hidden but accentuated with great beauty and shown for their inherent beauty that shines forth.

A FEW PRACTICES TO BE AWAKENED TO BEAUTY

How do we nourish our beauty-starved spirits? Let me suggest a few practices that might help us open our eyes to the beauty that surrounds us and sustains us. **First, slow down.** **Beauty reveals itself to those who take time to notice. Wander around intentionally in nature in the mood of openness.** It is different from physical exercise. Put your mind in different senses. Move your awareness into your ears, nose, and eyes. The world opens; the spirit opens. The tiny little flowers, little mosses, shape of the trees, following of the way. Not moving your brain but letting your senses guide you to engage your heart. In that playful openness, you are nature in nature, allowing to be prayer, and to be the threshold of divine presence.

Second, create beauty, even in small ways. You don't have to be a professional artist to participate in the creation of beauty. Arrange flowers in a vase. Whatever creation will let you see the world through God's eyes.

Practice gratitude for beauty. When you encounter something beautiful—whether it's a sunset, a piece of music, an act of kindness, or a mathematical equation—pause to give thanks. Purple flowers on the road, yellow flower fields—let gratitude sing in your heart. Recognize the divine Artist who created this amazing beauty, and divine generosity that sustains all things.

Beauty requires a spiritual energy to open, like a petal, to beauty, and this energy must be cultivated. May God's divine beauty of creation penetrate your heart; you be awakened to the mystery of divine beauty that filled the entire world, that was charged with the grandeur of God!