Lessons From A Snowflake

Psalm 51:7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

The Snowflake Man
• Wilson Bentley was 15 years old
  o when his mother gave him a microscope
    ▪ for his birthday.
• Bentley was born in 1865 near Jericho, Vermont.
  o He was a farmer’s son
    ▪ and didn’t attend school until he was 14.
• But Bentley’s mother was a former schoolteacher,
  o and from her he acquired a lively curiosity
    ▪ and a love of nature’s minutiae.
    • Feathers,
    • insects,
    • and bits of stone,
      ▪ all excited his interest.
  o By the time he was eight years old
    ▪ he had made a collection
      • of almost every species of fern
      • that grew in Vermont.
• But it was snowing on Wilson Bentley’s 15th birthday
  o and all of those things
    ▪ that normally delighted him
      • were buried under a blanket
      • of fresh white snow.
• So Wilson turned his attention to the snow
  o and used his new microscope
    ▪ to zoom in on an individual snowflake.
  o In the fleeting moment before it melted,
    ▪ he glimpsed the dazzling beauty of a snowflake.
  o What he saw was incredible.
    ▪ It had intricate patterns
      • that were replicated perfectly
        ▪ on all six points.
      ▪ It was a genuine work of art,
        • a natural masterpiece.
• That day excited a passion in Wilson that never subsided.
  o By the time he was twenty
    ▪ the farm boy had perfected a technique
      • for photographing snow crystals.
• His father and brother couldn’t understand
why he “fussed over snowflakes.”

- In fact everyone thought
  - that he was kind of flakey
  - because of his obsession with snow.

- But during the next 50 years,
  - Wilson Bentley took over 5,000
    - enlarged photographs of snowflakes.
  - He eventually published a book
    - of his exquisite photographs
      - and late in life he gained
        - a worldwide reputation
        - as an expert on snow.

Lesson One
In all his photographs of snowflakes, however,

- Bentley never found two that were alike.
  - In fact, he was the first person
    - to recognize and catalogue this fact.

- Bentley said,
  - Every crystal was a masterpiece of design;
    - no one design was ever repeated.
  - When a snowflake melted,
    - that design was forever lost.
  - Just that much beauty was gone,
    - without leaving any record
    - [of its existence] behind.

- Wilson Bentley photographed over 5,000 snowflakes
  - and found every one of them to be unique.

- Think about for a minute.
  - There are over 10 million snowflakes
    - in a single cup of snow.
  - The amount of snowflakes
    - that can fall in just one hour,
      - in a heavy snow
      - like we had Wednesday night,
        - is staggering.
  - And each of those snowflakes is uniquely different
    - from every other one
    - that falls from the sky.

- If you want to know
  - the mathematical probabilities involved,
    - scientists have calculated
      - that the chances of two snowflakes
      - being exactly alike
- are about one in a million trillion
  - (that is a 10 followed by 17 zeros).
- Right now there is a pile of snow
  o out by the handicap ramp
  - that was every bit of three feet high
  - before it started melting.
- There are 18 million snowflakes
  o in a single cubic foot of snow.
  - That is a huge pile of snowflakes
  - and not a single one of them
    o is like any other.
- This is the first lesson that I want you to learn
  o this afternoon from a snowflake:
  - **You are unique!**
- The same God who created
  o the conditions of random chance
  - that work together to create
    - intricately and elegantly designed
      o individual snowflakes
  - that rain from the heavens
    - at a rate of trillions per hour,
  - each one unique,
    - but each one having six identical points,
  - **That same God is the God who made you!**
- If he cares enough
  o to invest individual and flawless design
    - into every snowflake that falls from the heavens,
      - how much more must he care about your life.
- Job said of God, in **Job 10:8**
  o *Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together.*
    - The very hands of God
      - have framed and fashioned your life.
    - He made you,
      - and he made you uniquely you.
  - There is no one else on earth
    - that is just like you!
      o There never has been,
      o and there never will be.
  - There is no one else on earth
    - that has the same qualities
      o and characteristics
      o that you have.
- God himself intentionally made you who you are.
  o The same God
that calls the snow from his storehouse
  • and insures each individual flake is unique
    o he crafted you in your mother's womb.

• If you were to search the whole world,
  o you wouldn't find two people
    • who had the same footprint
      • or fingerprint
      • or voiceprint.
    o Each person is unique.

• Why is that such an important lesson to learn?
  o Because it helps you to understand
    • that you are here today by divine design.
  o God fashioned you and formed you
    • and he made you perfect
      • according to his plan and purpose for your life.

• You, as a person,
  o are the combination
    • of many seemingly random things.
  o Not only are your fingerprints,
    • voiceprints,
    • footprints,
    • even the design of the iris of your eye,
      • completely unique.
  o You are further made an individual by other factors.
    • You are the compilation of DNA
      • gathered from both
        o your mother and father.
    • DNA that was further impacted
      • by your grandparents
        o and great grandparents,
        o on down the line.

• Your personality and character
  o are the compilation of all of your life experiences.
    • Everything that has happened to you along the way.
  o Your education,
    • your work,
    • your skills,
    • your talents,
    • they all combine together
      o to make a completely unique you.

• The Psalmist said, in Psalms 139:14
  o I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
  o
• David lived in an age of rudimentary science at best,
  o but he saw enough
    ▪ of the intricacy and individuality of human life
      • to recognize the fact
    ▪ that he was fearfully and wonderfully made
      • and that knowledge inspired praise in David.
    ▪ I will praise you God, f
      • or I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
  • As we consider the snowflake this morning,
    o the knowledge of its uniqueness,
      ▪ and the understanding that we too
        • are uniquely fashioned by God,
      ▪ should inspire each of us to praise the Lord.
  • Indeed, my life is not random at all.
    o The circumstances that have brought me to this place
      ▪ are not just the product of chance.
    o God has made me into the person that I am
      ▪ and if he has made me this way
        • then he certainly has a plan
        • and purpose for my life!
    o That, alone, should be enough
      ▪ to stir us to worship this morning!
• Let the snowflake remind you today
  o that you were fearfully and wonderfully made!

Lesson Two
This leads us to the second lesson to be learned form a snowflake.
  • What stunned and motivated Wilson Bentley to study snow
    o was the tremendous balance
      ▪ of order and recklessness.
  • Whatever their pattern and variety,
    o all snow crystals are six-sided.
  • This fact had intrigued
    o the German astronomer Johannes Kepler.
  • In 1610 Kepler wrote a book called The Six-Cornered Snowflake.
    o Why, asks Kepler in his book,
      ▪ do snowflakes fall as six-cornered starlets?
    o There must be a cause, he asserts,
      ▪ for if it happens by chance,
        • then why don't snowflakes fall
          o with five corners
          o or with seven?
    o At the end of his book,
      ▪ Kepler confesses his ignorance
        • and leaves the problem
• of the snowflake’s symmetry
  o for future generations to figure out.
• The riddle of the snowflake has since been solved.
  o Physicists have traced
    ▪ the snowflake’s six-sided secret
    ▪ to the form of the water molecule,
      o and, ultimately, to the laws of atomic bonding
        ▪ that give the water molecule its shape.
  o Water is a combination of an atom of oxygen
    ▪ linked with two atoms of hydrogen
      ▪ in a regular six sided shape.
  o The six sides of the water molecule
    ▪ form the foundation for the shape of a snowflake.
  o But their growth as crystals
    ▪ has an element of randomness
      ▪ that gives them their individuality.
• The science behind a snowflake is incredible.
  o The snowflake is symmetrical
    ▪ because it reflects the internal order of the water molecule
      ▪ and the crystals that make up the snowflake
        ▪ are compiled in a predetermined order
          ▪ based upon the atomic structure
          ▪ and the laws of molecular binding.
  o But, if that was all there was to it,
    ▪ then each snowflake would be the same.
• But that is just the beginning.
  o The intricate shape
    ▪ of each of the six arms of a snowflake
      ▪ is determined by the atmospheric conditions
        ▪ experienced by entire ice crystal
          ▪ as it falls.
  o Snowflakes look stable
    ▪ but at the atomic level they are a frenzy of activity,
      ▪ as the water shifts
      ▪ and electronic bonds between molecules
        ▪ are made and broken
        ▪ a million times a second.
    ▪ Faults in the crystal jump
      ▪ from place to place
        ▪ and are repaired.
  o A crystal might begin to grow arms in one manner,
    ▪ and then minutes or even seconds later,
      ▪ slight changes in the surrounding
        ▪ temperature or humidity
• causes the crystal to grow
  o in another way.

  o Although the six-sided shape is always maintained,
    ▪ the ice crystal grows in a unique manner.
    • However, because each of its six arms
      o experiences the same atmospheric conditions,
        ▪ the arms are formed
        ▪ in an identical manner.

  o Due to the atmospheric conditions
    ▪ that it encounters
      • each snowflake has six
      • identical, intricately designed, points.

  o However, since each snowflake encounters
    ▪ a unique set of atmospheric conditions
      • each snowflake is formed differently.

  o Over a trillion times an hour,
    ▪ an intricate yet beautiful snowflake
      • is formed in the midst of atomic chaos.

  o It is one of nature’s most profound mysteries.
    ▪ Beauty and structure arise
      • from a delicate balance
        o of order and disorder.

• This is the second lesson that I want us to learn
  o from a snowflake this afternoon.

  ▪ **There is a divine plan in the chaos of your life!**

• Your life may seem to be
  o the compilation of random chance
    ▪ but there is a divine order
      • to the events and happenings of your life.

  o All of these external forces
    ▪ have shaped and formed you
      • and while they may seem random
        o to the casual observer,
          ▪ they weren’t.

  o Each event in your life
    ▪ has been divinely orchestrated
      • to order your life
        o according to God’s purpose.
          ▪ There is a design!

• God has a plan for you.
  o You didn’t just wander into a church by accident.
    ▪ You were shaped for a purpose!

  o God created everything in the world for a purpose
    ▪ and that includes you.
• You’re not here by accident.
  • God made you for a reason.

• You were designed by God,
  • it was his idea to make you,
    ▪ and it’s not a mistake.
  • You were planned before birth.

• The Lord told Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:5
  • Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
    ▪ and before you were born I consecrated you;
    ▪ I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

• The Bible clearly teaches
  • that you were purposefully and personally
    ▪ planned and designed by God.
  • His loving hand made you
    ▪ exactly the way you are.
  • You are you
    ▪ because God wanted you to be you.

• God gave you unique spiritual gifts,
  • a unique heart,
  • unique abilities,
  • a unique personality,
  • and a lifetime of unique experiences
    ▪ so you would make your own
      • unique difference
      • in the world.

• The way you’ve been put together
  • will affect every area of your life
    ▪ your relationships,
    ▪ your career,
    ▪ your finances,
    ▪ your enjoyment,
    ▪ your hobbies,
    ▪ and your recreation.
  • Your uniqueness
    ▪ is what God wants you
      • to offer to the world.
  • God designed you
    ▪ to minister to hurting world.
      • There is a ministry
        ▪ that only you can fulfill!

• Your experiences,
  • the seeming random events of your life,
    ▪ have conspired together
      • to make you a tool in the hands of the lord
There is a work that only you can do.
• There are souls that only you can reach.
• God has blessed you with experiences,
  o both good and bad,
    ▪ that uniquely equip you
      • to minister to some individual in this world
        o that desperately needs to know him.
• We can marvel at the snowflakes,
  o but we, as human beings,
    ▪ are much more complex than snowflakes.
  o Each of us has been endowed by God
    ▪ with a completely unique spectrum of gifts.
  o Each one of us can do things,
    ▪ say things,
    ▪ think things
      • in different ways.
  o Each of us fills a specific role
    ▪ in the Kingdom of God!
• In a hurting world every need must be addressed.
  o And in order to accomplish that
    ▪ every one of us must excel
      • at being the unique individual
        o that God made us to be.
• Today, let us learn a lesson from the snowflakes
  o that covered our parking lot this week.
• They were formed
  o in a seemingly random and chaotic environment.
    ▪ However, when they finally made landfall,
      • there was a specific,
      • ordered and unique
      • six-pointed design
        o to each of them.
• Let the snowflake remind you today
  o that God made you for a purpose!

Lesson Three
This brings me back around to our text
• and to the final lesson to be learned
  o from a snowflake today.
• A few years ago I discovered something
  o that I never knew about snow.
    ▪ Every snowflake has a tiny piece of dust at its core.
  o Snow crystals begin their growth
• on a nucleus of wind-borne dust
  o and they carry, at the center of their intricate design,
    ▪ an invisible grain of dirt.
• This is how snow forms.
  o Somewhere high in the heavens,
    ▪ a water molecule bonds to a speck of dust
      • as it fell through the atmosphere.
• It happens over and over again
  o as the small flake of snow
    ▪ passes through the atmosphere
  o gathering more and more
    ▪ water molecules
      • to form the branches and points
        o of the snowflake.
  o Until the flake finally falls to the earth
    ▪ as a completely unique snowflake.
• I must admit, I was shocked when I discovered
  o that a particle of airborne dust
    ▪ provides the nucleolus around which
      • a snowflake grows.
  o Every intricate, immaculate, snowflake
    ▪ has a dirty heart at its core.
  o The beautiful crystal
    ▪ with its incredible design,
      • conceals a single speck of dirt.
• When you look at it from the outside,
  o it is brilliant and white,
    ▪ a wonderland of frozen crystals
      • that seems so pure and flawless.
  o Yet, somewhere down there
    ▪ on a level that you and I cannot see,
      • there is hidden in the heart of the snowflake
        o a tiny speck of dirt.
• When you think about it,
  o it quickly becomes obvious
    ▪ that we have more in common with the snowflake
      • than we ever imagined.
  o We also have possessed a dirty, sin stained, heart.
    ▪ No matter how well we dress up the outside,
      • no matter how perfect the façade may be,
        o the human heart is inherently tarnished by sin.
  o Each and every one of us
    ▪ has the same problem that the snowflake has,
      • at the heart of the issue,
• our heart has been stained by sin.

- However, it doesn’t have to stay that way.
  - Through the prophet Isaiah (1:18),
    - God extended an invitation to you and me:
      - “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD:
        - though your sins be as scarlet,
        - they shall be as white as snow…”

- My favorite thing about a snowfall
  - is how it changes everything.
    - The whole world becomes a much prettier place
      - for at least a few hours
    - as a fresh blanket of new snow
      - covers all the impurities and imperfections.
  - Everything is made brand new by the miracle of snow.
- God has extended to each of us
  - an invitation to experience
    - a similar transformation in the spiritual realm.
  - When the blood of Jesus is applied
    - to the heart of an individual,
      - it cleanses him from all sin.
  - God removes every stain
    - and washes him even whiter than snow.
- This is why David prayed in our text, *Psalm 51:7*,
  - “…wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”
    - Wash me, David said.
      - Cleanse me,
        - and I will be whiter than snow.
  - How do you get whiter than snow?
    - The answer lies in the third lesson
      - we can learn from a snowflake this afternoon.
- In the Hebrew language
  - there are two words that express
    - the different kinds of washing,
  - and they are always used
    - in a distinct manner
      - to indicate the kind of washing
        - that takes place.
- One word for “wash”
  - indicates the kind of washing
    - which only cleanses the surface
      - of an object that the water cannot penetrate.
  - This is the kind of washing you do on your car,
    - or your floor when you mop it.
  - You can’t wash it through and through,
• you can only clean the surface of it.

• This is the kind of washing
  o that takes place in the formation
    ▪ of a snowflake.
  o The speck of dust is covered.
    ▪ It is concealed.
  o It is transformed on the surface,
    ▪ but at its core it is still dirty.

• Just like the pristine tranquil beauty of a snowfall.
  o Under the beautiful blanket of snow,
    ▪ all the trash, and imperfections are still there
      • and with a few hours of harsh sunlight,
        o they will be revealed again.

• However, that’s not the word for wash that the Psalmist used.
  o The Hebrew word used by our songwriter
    ▪ is one that signifies the kind of washing
      • which penetrates completely
        o through the substance
        o of the thing washed,
          ▪ and cleanses it thoroughly.

• It is the word that is applied
  o to the washing of clothes
    ▪ a process where a thing is washed
      • through and through.

• This is the same word that David used
  o in verse 2 of this same Psalm (51:2)
    ▪ when he said
      • "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,
        o and cleanse me from my sin;"

• Wash me, David said, and I shall be whiter than snow.
  o This is the third lesson to be learned from a snowflake.
    ▪ In the matter of cleansing,
      ▪ we are different from the snowflake.

• This is where the similarity ends.
  o When God washes us,
    ▪ he washes us whiter than snow.

• He doesn’t just cover up our dirty heart –
  o he washes it through and through.

• My sins don’t remain.
  o The stains upon my heart
    ▪ are completely washed away.

• I am given a brand new heart!
  o My past is forever in the past.
    ▪ It is cast as far as the east is from the west.
• never to be remembered against me again!
  • Wash me, David said,
    o cleanse me through and through!

Close
The old songwriter wrote these words:

Are you washed in the blood,
In the soul cleansing blood of the Lamb?
Are your garments spotless?
Are they white as snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

As I looked over my yard Thursday morning,
  • I was struck by the sheer beauty of the snow.
    o But I was also reminded
      ▶ that this beauty is a passing thing.
  • What is at first pristine and white
    o will soon become a muddy mess.
  • The beauty that a snowfall brings is temporary.
    o It is a fleeting thing.

This morning, as I consider
  the temporary nature of a snowfall,
  I am very thankful for the permanent nature
  of the cleansing blood of Jesus.
  • I’ve been washed in the blood
    o and it was more than just a temporary change.
      ▶ My soul was cleansed
        • by the blood of the lamb.
          o I’ve been washed through and through.

Today, if you’ve been washed in that precious blood
  • then you should celebrate the fact
    o that he washed you whiter than snow.
      ▶ Not just a temporary transformation
        • but a permanent change.
  • And if, by chance, you have things in your heart
    o that haven’t been covered by that precious blood
      ▶ then this afternoon would be the perfect opportunity
        • to allow the blood of Jesus
          o to cleanse your heart.
  • All you have to do
    o is pray like David prayed,
      ▶ “Wash me, Lord, whiter than snow!”