

I did some research about the top five things people are looking for in someone they are going on a date with. It's been a long time since I've been in the game, and I thought some research would be helpful. The number five element people are looking for is smell. That makes sense—you want to smell the flowers and the meal, but not your date. You've got to take a shower. Number four is similar interests: people want to find someone who shares their hobbies, such as hiking, movies, music, or working out. Number three is a sense of humor: people want to find someone who will make them laugh. Number two is kindness. If you are rude to the waiter and insulting to your coworkers and family members, that's a major turn off. What's the number one most important thing people are looking for on a first date? Physical attraction. It's the first thing most people take note of. Different people are attracted to different things, but we are hardwired to take note of someone's appearance and evaluate if we find it satisfying and pleasing.

As humans we look for beauty everywhere—not just in a date or a spouse, but all around us. People pay \$1,000 a ticket to see Hamilton because of the beauty of the play. We'll spend an entire day in a museum to see the beauty of different paintings and sculptures. We'll spend time cutting our grass and landscaping our yard because we want the outside of our home to be beautiful. We are drawn to beauty.

Social scientists have studied the way different people value food. Lower income people are focused on food quantity, having enough to eat. Middle income people are focused on food quality, having delicious food to eat. Upper income people are focused on food aesthetics, on presentation and beauty. When you are at a high class restaurant, the food comes out as artwork. It's not sufficient to simply have it taste good and fill me up; it's got to look beautiful.

The desire for beauty is part of what sets us apart from the rest of the created order. Though some animals can gauge aesthetics for the sake of finding an ideal breeding partner, most animals are entirely unaware of beauty. If you go on a safari, you won't find elephants standing in front of a waterfall, giraffes gasping at a double rainbow, or hippos looking up at the night sky and counting the stars. Humans are uniquely designed and created to recognize and appreciate beauty. It's part of what it means to be created in the image of God. When you are in the presence of something or someone beautiful, the natural response is to focus on the beauty, to praise the beauty. When Keren and I went to Italy for our honeymoon, we saw Michelangelo's David, the Pieta, and St. Peter's Basilica. We spent time in Florence and saw breathtaking works of art and architecture from the Renaissance. The entire time we were there we kept talking about how beautiful everything was. It wasn't that we were trying to—we had to. Beauty, when observed, solicits appreciation and praise. The beauty itself served no utilitarian purpose. But nevertheless, it nourished and inspired our souls. That's what beauty does.

I am talking about all of this because today, as we continue our **God is** series, we get to focus on and celebrate the fact that **God is beautiful**. God is not only loving and holy, good and faithful, powerful and approachable—He is beautiful. I believe this is one of the most overlooked attributes of God. Listen to the way Ezekiel described the vision of God he had in Ezekiel 1:26-28:

Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli [*the entire throne was made of this precious brilliant blue stone, the same type of stone used in King Tutankhamun's burial mask*], and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

God is so, so beautiful. In fact, Ezekiel went on to say, “This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown.” He revealed the beauty of God.

When John was invited into heaven, he saw a vision of the Lord. This is how he described it: “At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne” (Revelation 4:2-3). God is beautiful.

In Psalm 27:4, the writer of Scripture says, “One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.” The only thing he wanted was to be near God and to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

For many people, this is a transformational way of understanding God. When you’ve thought about God, you’ve thought about Him as big and powerful, righteous and just, merciful and loving, but you probably haven’t spent enough time thinking about how beautiful God is. Something I hear all the time from people is a fear or worry that heaven is going to be boring. They are worried they’ll get tired of sitting on a cloud for thousands of years singing Chris Tomlin songs on repeat. That vision of heaven is wrong for so many reasons. For one, heaven isn’t going to be “up there”; heaven is actually God dwelling with us on an earth that has been made brand new. And two, worship in heaven won’t be like singing the same song over and over and over again; worship will be your natural response of joy and delight in spending all of eternity in the presence of the epitome of beauty itself. Have you gotten bored in the middle of the greatest movie of all time? Have you gotten bored in the middle of the greatest sporting event of all time? Have you gotten bored in the middle of the greatest meal you’ve ever eaten or the first time you heard your all-time favorite song? Did you get bored on your wedding night? Imagine the sum total of all the arrestingly beautiful experiences you’ve ever had, times that by a million, and imagine it lasting for all of eternity. That is what heaven will be like, and more, because God is not only perfectly just and powerful and loving, but He is also perfectly beautiful.

And that is not something available to us only when we die—beholding the beauty of God is available to us now. Fredrick Faber once wrote about this:

We can exaggerate about many things; but we can never exaggerate our obligation to Jesus, or the compassionate abundance of the love of Jesus to us. All our lives long we might talk of Jesus, and yet we should never come to an end of the sweet things that might be said of Him. Eternity will not be long enough to learn all He is, or to praise Him for all He has done, but then, that matters not; for we shall be always with Him, and we desire nothing more.”

God is beautiful.

Over 1,000 years ago, when Prince Vladimir was rising to power in ancient Russia, he began his reign as a devout pagan. He built temples to a variety of different local deities. He killed people for telling him no. When a woman rejected his advances, he kidnapped her and made her his wife by force. He had 800 concubines. He was not a moral man. Then one day he knew he needed to unite the region, so he sent envoys throughout the world to study different faiths. They studied Islam, Judaism, and Christianity most intensely. They all came back and made their reports. Vladimir was unimpressed with Islam and Judaism for various reasons, but when the envoys came back from visiting the Christians they said, “We beheld such beauty, we know not how to tell of it. We knew not whether we were in Heaven or on Earth. . . . We only know that God dwells there among the people, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations.” Vladimir said he wanted to worship a God like that, a God who was beautiful. And it wasn’t just a political ploy. He became a true convert, trying to live the teachings of Scripture. From his own wealth

he provided food and drink to the needy, protected the marginalized and secured their rights by creating courtrooms with judges to defend against abuse, built schools, and even visited people in their homes to pray for them. He was captivated by a beautiful God, and it transformed his life, his reign, and his entire country for generations.

As people today decide what they are going to believe, like Prince Vladimir they are looking for something that is beautiful. The philosopher Plato stated 2,400 years ago that the three highest virtues among humanity were the good, the true, and the beautiful. Interestingly, this has unintentionally shaped the form of Christian witness and evangelism throughout the centuries. In the initial years of the Church, the world looked at this rag-tag group of followers of Jesus, and though it appeared to them they believed in myths and fairies and some guy who had impossibly risen from the dead, they saw in their community a good life. They saw slave owners become Christians and release their slaves; they saw husbands who were once abusive become gentle and kind to their wives; they saw people who used to steal and connive become generous and kind. When plagues hit cities and all the wealthy fled to their summer homes in the mountains, Christians went into the cities, tended to the sick, and buried the dead. As the world watched and saw their good lives, the world wanted the Christians to teach them how to be good. A large percentage of the Western world at that time abandoned their pantheon of gods and embraced Christianity. Goodness won the world.

Then a shift happened. The conversations and focus changed over the generations. In the period of the Enlightenment, people were drawn to the pursuit of truth. Philosophy had its golden era. Scientists were making new discoveries constantly. There was a near universal pursuit of truth, of objective, indisputable facts. And in that era, Christianity began to contend in the public forum as a religion uniquely based upon evidence that is factually true and verifiable. This is part of what resulted in the rise of evidential apologetics. Christians said, “Don’t take it only on faith that God created the world, but look at the evidence, see what is true, follow where the truth leads you. Don’t take it only on faith that Jesus rose from the dead, but look at the evidence, see what is true, follow where the truth leads you. Don’t take it only on faith that the Bible is God’s Word and without error, but look at the evidence, see what is true, follow where the truth leads you.”

For a long time in world history, Christianity focused on winning the world by focusing on that which was morally good and that which was evidently true, but the world is changing. What the world cares about is changing. The culture isn’t that interested in listening to Christians talk about what is morally good anymore; the culture isn’t that interested in listening to Christians talk about what is factually true anymore. But the world is more interested than ever in beauty. I believe if we want to win the world of today, not the world of yesterday, we must show the world that God is not only good and true, but God is beautiful.

Now clearly God does not take physical form for us to see; He doesn’t appear as a GQ model or as Miss Universe. He doesn’t take the shape of a breathtaking painting or an inspirational piece of music. But nevertheless, all that God is and does is beautiful. We see this again and again in the life of Jesus, who is the image of the invisible God. Jesus showed us who God is and what God is like, and everything He did was beautiful. Now, we know at a certain level, on the surface, Jesus didn’t come with the most arresting appearance anyone had ever seen. In fact, in a prophecy about him in the book of Isaiah we are told: “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2). Jesus wasn’t beautiful in the way a Brad Pitt is beautiful; He was beautiful in a far deeper way. Everything He said and everything He did was marked by beauty. His life epitomized beauty in a way the world had never seen before.

Jesus began His public ministry in His hometown. He went into the synagogue where He had heard a thousand sermons, but this time He stood up and gave a sermon. He opened the scroll of Isaiah and read a prophesy about the Messiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Isn’t that beautiful—that God came first and foremost not for the powerful and wealthy, but for the poor, the prisoner, the blind, and the oppressed? He came for the people who felt like they had gone their entire lives with no one ever advocating for them. God Himself advocated for them. How beautiful is that?!

One time a leper came up to Him and cried out, “Lord, if you are willing you can make me clean” (Matthew 8:2). Healing him would have been enough. That would have been an astounding miracle in and of itself. But what did Jesus do? He reached out and touched this man who no one had touched in years and said, “I am willing, be clean” (Matthew 8:3). How beautiful is that?!

There was a woman who had been bleeding for 13 years, who had spent every last dime she had going to doctors to get better. But instead of getting better, she only got worse. She was sick and losing hope and then one day, when a man called Jesus, who some said might be the Messiah, came to town, she literally crawled through the crowds and reached out to touch the hem of His garment. As soon as she touched Him, Jesus knew it. He looked at her as she cowered in shame and embarrassment. But He said, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Be free from your suffering” (Mark 5:34). And she was cured. How beautiful is that?!

One time there was a man who lay paralyzed for 38 years. Jesus said to him, “Pick up your mat and walk” (Luke 5:24). And he did. How beautiful is that?!

Jairus lost his daughter, but Jesus went up into her room, grabbed her by the hand and said, “Little girl, get up” (Luke 8:54). And Jesus gave back this daughter to her heartbroken parents. How beautiful is that?!

One time Jesus was approaching a town called Nain. As He entered the city, He saw a large crowd having a wake—they were on their way to bury a boy. His mother had already lost her husband; her son was all she had left. You can imagine how distraught and helpless she was. (This week I read the words of a mother who just lost her son. She said, “I’m broken. And I’ll never be whole again.”) Jesus interrupted the wake, went to that little boy, and said, “Young man, get up” (Luke 7:14). And Jesus gave this woman her son back. How beautiful is that?!

When all the religious leaders of the day wanted to be invited into the homes of the rich, powerful, and influential, Jesus went out of his way to spend time with the tax collectors. He shared his meals with the prostitutes. He looked at little kids who had nothing of value to offer Him and said, “Let the children come to me. The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14). How beautiful is that?!

On the last night of His life, when His disciples were arguing about who was the greatest, who would have the most power and rule over the others, Jesus got up, took off His outer garment, found a basin of water and a towel, and got down on His knees and washed their feet. He said, “Though I am your Lord and Master, I am among you as one who serves” (see John 13:1-20). No one had ever conceptualized that Christ would condescend in that way. God Himself, taking the role of the lowest slave to wash filthy feet, which was symbolic of the reality that He would go to any length to wash away all our sins—how beautiful is that?!

Think about one of the last miracles Jesus performed. He was in the Garden of Gethsemane and a mob of several hundred soldiers came to arrest Him. As they tried to apprehend Jesus, there was a bit of a scuffle with the disciples, and Peter cut off the ear of one of the soldiers. Can you imagine him, writhing in pain, blood pouring everywhere, he's terrified of how he'll look, that he'll never hear the same again? And then Jesus goes to the man who came to the Garden intent on arresting him and killing him, and He picks up his ear and He heals him. How beautiful is that?!

When Jesus was on the cross, people walked by Him and mocked Him, spat on Him, and cursed Him. Jesus said, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). One of the men who was crucified next to Him cried out and begged Him for mercy. And even though the man had made an absolute mess of his life, Jesus said, "Today, you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). His mother was there at the foot of the cross, watching her son be tortured. It's impossible to imagine the pain she felt in that moment. Jesus looked at one of His disciples and said, "She's your mom, now. Take care of her for me" (see Luke 19:26-27). That woman who birthed Him in a manger, changed His diapers, put food on His plate and clothes on His back—at the very end He made sure she was provided for. How beautiful is that?!

Today, the world isn't that interested in hearing Christians tell them how to live a good life, the world isn't that interested in hearing Christians tell them what is true. Right now, the world is looking for something beautiful to put its hope in. God is the very essence and the epitome of beauty. Everyone is looking for beauty these days. We'll pay an inordinate price to find it. But we know where true beauty can be found. Our job is to put that beauty on display by the way we worship God and live our lives on His behalf. I want to return to a passage we mentioned earlier and challenge you to make this your prayer today: "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple" (Psalm 27:4). Let's pray to be able to see God's beauty and pray that others would see how beautiful He is when they see the ways He's changed our lives.