



# ART AND THE GOSPEL

Session Four:  
The Beauty of  
The LORD

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One thing have I desired of the LORD; one thing I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days  
of my life,  
to behold the fair beauty of the LORD,\*  
and to seek him in his temple.

Psalm 27.4-5 (New Coverdale Psalter)  
only verse 4 in other English translations

## Class Outline

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# BEAUTY IN GENERAL

- I. What is Beauty and Why is it Important?

# THEOLOGY OF BEAUTY

- II. What is the Beauty of God?
- III. Beauty in the Beginning... (Genesis 1-2)
- IV. ...And the Ending. (Revelation 21-22)

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# WHAT IS BEAUTY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?



## I. What is Beauty and Why is it Important?

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- Beauty is the harmony between something's intrinsic qualities that, when perceived or experienced, gives us a sense of pleasure, delight, awe, and wonder.
- Beauty is one of the transcendentals of being, along with goodness and truth.

I. What is Beauty and Why is it Important?

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## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TRANSCENDENTALS

“[B]eauty... will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with her in a mysterious act of vengeance. We can be sure that whoever sneers [at beauty]... can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love”

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. 1*

“When people cease to be surrounded by beauty, they cease to hope.”

N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*

## I. What is Beauty and Why is it Important?

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- Beauty is the harmony between something's intrinsic qualities that, when perceived or experienced, gives us a sense of pleasure, delight, awe, and wonder.
- Beauty is one of the transcendentals of being, along with goodness and truth.
- Beauty is rooted in God's eternal, unchanging divine nature.

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WHAT IS THE  
BEAUTY OF GOD?



## II. What is the Beauty of God?

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# GOD'S DIVINE NATURE: SIMPLICITY

- “God [is] without body, parts, or passion.”  
*Of Faith in the Holy Trinity, Article I of the 39 Articles of Religion*

God is not divisible; God simply *is*. Therefore, God's attributes are also indivisible from each other and God himself.

- “When **my glory passes by**, I will will put you in a cleft of the rock and cover you **until I have passed by.**”  
Exodus 32.22
- “God is love”  
1 John 4.18

## II. What is the Beauty of God?

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# GOD'S BEAUTY AND GLORY

Ascribe to the LORD, you sons of God,  
Ascribe to the LORD **glory and strength.**  
Ascribe to the LORD **the glory due his name.**  
Worship the LORD in [his] **beautiful holiness.**

Psalm 29.1-2 (own translation, see also, Psalm 96.7-9 and 2 Chronicles 16.28-30)

II. What is the Beauty of God?

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## GOD'S BEAUTY AND GLORY

On that day [of judgment] the Branch of the LORD [Messiah] shall be beautiful and glorious.

Isaiah 4.2 (NRSV)

## II. What is the Beauty of God?

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# GOD'S BEAUTY AND GLORY

That wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards  
will be trampled underfoot.

That fading flower, [Ephraim's] glorious beauty  
[will be swallowed up].

In that day the LORD Almighty  
will be a glorious crown,  
a beautiful wreath  
for the remnant of his people.

Isaiah 28.4-5 (NIV 2011)

## II. What is the Beauty of God?

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### GOD'S BEAUTY IS...

...God himself in his glory, the experience of whom produces in us a sense of wonder, awe, and transcendence.

We do not experience the attributes of God abstractly; we experience God himself—God himself *in* his beauty, in his glory, etc.

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BEAUTY IN THE BEGINNING...  
GENESIS 1 AND 2

### III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## TWO TAKE-AWAYS FROM GENESIS 1 AND 2

1. The display of God's beauty through creation is an intentional act of God's self-revelation.
2. God's beauty is a necessary element of our flourishing; his beauty fills, informs, and transforms every aspect of our lives.

### III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## CREATION AS GOD'S COSMIC TEMPLE

Genesis 1.1-2.3 follows a common Ancient Near East vision of a temple as a royal palace for the Gods. Just a few selective examples:

1. The 7 days of creation reflect the common 7 day ceremony of temple inauguration.
2. An icon, or image of the god, is placed at the center of the temple to represent the presence of the god.
3. The temple inauguration is complete when the god “moves” into the temple and “rests.”  
This “rest” is the seating of an authority on the throne to establish one’s rule over their kingdom.



III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## GENESIS 1 AS A LITURGY OF CREATION

The Call to Worship – Genesis 1.1-2

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty<sup>1</sup>, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Genesis 1.1-2 (NIV 2011)

<sup>1</sup> Heb: *tohu wa-bohu/va-vohu* – “chaotic and desolate”

III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## GENESIS 1 AS A LITURGY OF CREATION

Versicles and Responses, Silence is Kept – Genesis 1.3-25

Ÿ (*God*) “Let there be...”

Ź (*Creation*) *And there was*

### III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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# GENESIS 1 AS A LITURGY OF CREATION

Versicles and Responses, Silence is Kept – Genesis 1.3-25

Domains and Habitats	Inhabitants
<b>Genesis 1.3-13 – Ordering Chaos</b>	<b>Genesis 1.14-31 – Filling Desolation</b>
Day 1: Day/Night	Day 4: Sun/Moon
Day 2: Sky/Water	Day 5: Birds/Fish
Day 3: Land/Vegetation	Day 6: Land animals/Human Beings

III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## GENESIS 1 AS A LITURGY OF CREATION

Versicles and Responses, Silence is Kept – Genesis 1.3-25

God saw [what he made] and it was good. There was evening and there was morning , the *n*th day. *Silence is kept.*

Our invitation to

- Pause
- Contemplate God's glory
- Admire creation's "goodness" as it reflects God's divine nature
- Respond with worship

### III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## THE "GOODNESS" OF CREATION

Good – Heb: *tov*, Grk: *kalos* (Septuagint); good, beautiful, honest

Creation is...

- **Beautiful** (beauty) – creation is pleasing to God and reflects his beauty.
- **Moral** (goodness) – without sin or rebellion (cf. Genesis 3 – Revelation 20)
- **Fitting** (truth) – or “functional;” each created thing is fulfilling its God-ordained function, role, and purpose.

III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## THE OUTER COURT, THE SANCTUARY, AND THE HOLY OF HOLIES

The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight...

Genesis 2.8–9a (NRSV), Regarding Eden

### III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## THE OUTER COURT, THE SANCTUARY, AND THE HOLY OF HOLIES

- God's presence dwelt in the Garden of Eden (the Holy of Holies)
- The "image of God" is placed in Eden, (the sanctuary of God).
- Both the name and description of Eden emphasizes its exceptional beauty, surpassing that of the rest of creation, (the outer court).

### III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## THE OUTER COURT, THE SANCTUARY, AND THE HOLY OF HOLIES

The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight...

Genesis 2.8–9a (NRSV), Regarding Eden

Gold is there; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.

Genesis 2.11c–12 (NRSV), Regarding the rest of creation



III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## THE CULTURAL MANDATE

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood...

1 Peter 2.9a (ESV)

III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## THE CULTURAL MANDATE: OUR ROYAL CALLING

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.” ...God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over [every living creature].”

Genesis 1.26a, 28 (ESV)

III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## THE CULTURAL MANDATE: OUR PRIESTLY CALLING

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Genesis 2.15 (ESV)

### III. Beauty in the Beginning...

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## THE CULTURAL MANDATE: AFTER THE FALL

- The Fall **did not** *revoke* this calling—it gets repeated to Noah, Abraham, and each of the Patriarchs.
- The Fall **did** make fulfilling this mandate *more difficult and frustrating*—the curse of pain, thistles, thorns, and sweat (Genesis 3.16-19)
- The Fall **also** *destroyed* our ability to recognize the beauty of God through creation, leading us to idolize creation and beauty rather than the Beautiful Creator (Romans 1.19-23)

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...AND THE ENDING  
REVELATION 21 AND 22

#### IV. ...And the Ending.

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## THE NEW CREATION: REVELATION OF GOD'S BEAUTY AND GLORY

I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband...the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”

Revelation 21.1–2, 23 (ESV)

#### IV. ...And the Ending.

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## THE NEW CREATION: REVELATION OF GOD'S BEAUTY AND GLORY

- The absence of the sea represents the total absence of chaos, danger, and desolation (cf. Genesis 1.2; Job 26.12-13; Isaiah 27.1, 59.9-10; Psalm 74.13-14, Psalm 89.9-10; Mark 4.35–41, 6.5-52; John 6.16-21; Revelation 13.1–10)
- The “city” (the Church)—has no “need” for a sun or moon, for God’s glory and beauty are now fully revealed in Christ.

IV. ...And the Ending.

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## THE NEW CREATION: CULTURAL MANDATE FULFILLED

By [the Lamb's] light, the nations will walk, and the kings of earth will bring their glory into it... they will bring into it the glory and honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it.

Revelation 21.24, 26-27a (ESV)



#### IV. ...And the Ending.

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## THE NEW CREATION: CULTURAL MANDATE FULFILLED

- Quoting from Isaiah 60
- “glory and honor” — wealth, beauty, and cultural products (cf. Ships of Tarshish in Is. 60, which were essentially a “wonder of the world” at that time)
- “You know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”  
1 Corinthians 15.58

IV. ...And the Ending.

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## THE NEW CREATION: EVERYTHING SAD IS COMING UNTRUE

You shall see that no theme may be played that does not have its uttermost source in me; no one can alter the music in my despite. Whoever attempts this shall prove to be nothing more than my instrument in devising things more wonderful which even he has not imagined.

J.R.R. Tolkien, "Ainulindalë" [Music of the Ainur], in *The Silmarillion*

IV. ...And the Ending.

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## THE NEW CREATION: EVERYTHING SAD IS COMING UNTRUE

Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Revelation 21.3-5 (NIV 2011)

For Further Study

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## WORKS CITED

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- Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, vol 1. Seeing the Form*
- G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*
- Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*
- Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," Address given at the inauguration of the Free University
- Richard Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem*
- D.C. Schindler, "Beauty in the Tradition: Hans Urs von Balthasar." Lecture at the Hildebrand Project's 2017 Summer Seminar: Retrieving Beauty
- J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*
- J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*
- N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*

## WORKS INSPIRING

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- The Collected Works of Wendell Berry
- Mike Cospers, *Recapturing the Wonder: Transcendent Faith in a Disenchanted World*
- Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Aesthetics, vol. 1 and 2*
- Jonathan King, *The Beauty of the Lord: Theology as Aesthetics (Studies in Historic and Systematic Theology)*
- Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Exodus*
- Roger Scruton, *Beauty*
- John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*