

Adventures in Mascara: How a Theology of Beauty Enriches the Body and Engages the World

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Beauty is a particular mix of personal intimacy and corporate engagement. Looking at Ezekiel 16, we're going to start with the private and move to the social, because the kingdom of God is a relational organism comprised of individuals. I fully invite you to discover the full spectrum of beauty within this chapter, however included is sections that will give us a “good enough” foundation for this conversation.

¹ “The word of the LORD came to me: ² ‘Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices and say, ‘this is what the Sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem:...’ ⁴ On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. ⁵ No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised.

⁶ Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, ‘Live!’ ⁷ I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels. Your breasts were formed and your hair grew, you who were naked and bare.

⁸ “ ‘Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the sovereign LORD, and you became mine.

⁹ “ ‘I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. ¹⁰ I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. ¹¹ I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck, ¹² and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. ¹³ So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen. ¹⁴ And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD.

¹⁵ “ ‘But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his....

²⁰ “ ‘and you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough?.....’ ²⁵ At the head of every street you built your lofty shrines and degraded your beauty, offering your body with increasing promiscuity to anyone who passed by.....’ ³⁰ “ ‘How weak-willed you are, declares the Sovereign LORD, when you do all these things, acting like a brazen prostitute!.....’ ³² “ ‘You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband!.....

⁴⁴ “ ‘Everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb about you: “Like mother, like daughter.” You are a true daughter of your mother, who despised her husband and her children; and you are a true sister of your sisters who despised their husbands and their children.

Ezekiel 16:1-15, 20,25,30,32,44-45 (NIV)

While you're absorbing that—if I were stranded on a desert island and was allowed one cosmetic item it would be black mascara. It's my favorite product because it's something almost every woman can wear. How many of you have black mascara? It doesn't matter your eye shape, skin color, height or weight, it works on almost every woman.

I live in a small Nebraska, Farming, Mennonite town settled in 1874. When I moved there 2 ½ years ago I was and am (by all known accounts) the first black person to move there and stay voluntarily. Away from anyone who looks like me, I wanted and still want to work towards being apart of this close knit, very German, very white westerner community. During college I'd experimented with my beauty from only wearing dresses, only wearing homemade dresses, to make up, no makeup, natural hair, relaxed hair, wigs, shaved head, a closet full of shoes to a very few pair of shoes. I found a beautiful part of me in all of them, but none of them were all of me. Among some of the most painful words I've ever heard are “we don't do your kind of hair,” and “We don't have your color.”

John and Stasi Eldredge in their book *Captivating* state that in general, women want 3 things: adventure, beauty and irresponsibility. For me that's true so, social rejection of beauty becomes a personal rejection of beauty. Can anyone relate? So in Henderson, as the only black woman I decided to give up on beauty and just rock the black mascara, because I will never be 'their' kind of beautiful. And I got many compliments on my eyes, but it wasn't all of me. I wanted this crazy natural beauty that just radiated from me. I wanted to float into a room and have angels sing. (Please tell I'm not the only one.) Yet I know that will never happen, I have hyper pigmentation so almost every zit I've ever had has left its mark. So, I started experimenting with the beauty in skill sets. I've been, in a very short time a Church Office Manager, Substitute Teacher, Summer Program Teacher, Preschool Director, Administrative Assistant, and Hotel Housekeeper—they all failed to create a natural angel beckoning beauty (imagine that!).

For me, these experiences bring the words of Ezekiel 16 to life. We all come into this world the same way—frankly a bloody mess, as this scripture says. And for *this* bloody mess the world does not care. We may find a dignifying element in many of things the world does, but the world will never dignify all of our humanity the way God designed it. But the good news for us hot bloody messes—which we all are at some point and can be at any age, is that God sees us. Not just once, but we are kept in His eye's view. In verses 6-8 first He says “Live,” then He says journey with me. In verse 8 God sees when we are old enough for love.

A few years ago a Bible study friend who worked coordinating probation officers for sex offenders shared she finally understood why we practice adult believer's baptism. We looked at her as if to say please share this revelation. She sighed and as she put her hand on her hip she said, “Because God is not a pedophile!”... Have you seen those 12, 13, 14 year old girls with racoon eyes? The rate of eating disorders? Sexual promiscuity? Or the plethora of other behaviors we women engage our beauty with?...God is never inappropriate with true beauty. Verse 25 lays it all on the table, when we engage our beauty with the world we degrade our beauty. Definition of *degarde*: to reduce in rank or status as in punishing; corrupting quality, moral character, or value; removal of one or more parts of the molecule; to decompose (literally to rot); to humiliate or shame painfully AND to do so in public. I don't like the sound of any of these words but for me they articulate my feelings and actions accurately.

Do you belong to God? Have you made a covenant with God through Jesus Christ? Then take this to heart: Forget the bloody mess you were. You are beautiful. Not because of your morning beauty routine, though it is not void of value, but first and foremost because God has provided for you.

“Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.” (16:8)
Now verse 9, God has this crazy way of being consistent all the way through his word. Listen because this is how He has provided for you.

“I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you.” (16:9)

What I hear is this, God has washed away the guilt of Christ’s blood through baptism. We often talk about the grace of Christ's blood, but there is also guilt with. We say if you were the only one on earth Christ would have died for you. If you were the only one on earth, it would be you driving the nails in his hands. What grace Christ has given, what guilt we bear, what mercy God has washed us with. Then He healed our wounds—that's love. Verse 10 goes on to describe the clothing. The Believers Church Bible Commentary suggests its parallel to the tabernacle—being clothed, envelope, consumed by the very Presence of God—that's a theology of beauty we can rest securely in. Verse 14 also repeats this.

“And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I ha given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD.” (16:14)

Definition of *splendor*: Magnificent richness; to shine; brightness; brilliance. In other words, when God's women float into a room the angels can't help but sing because the splendor of God is on display through us. Amen.

“And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was not your prostitution enough?” (16:20)
“Everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb about you: 'Like mother, like daughter.'” (16:44)

We know we're beautiful and the true source of that beauty, which unlike a certain size or skin color can be attained equally and fully by all. Do those around us know this kind of beauty is available?

“On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do these things for you...” (16:4-5)

One of my favorite sermons growing up was on being salt and light from Matthew 5:13. I loved it because the tag-line was 'You Were Born to Shake It.' We're all designed to shake it but we all come into this world unseasoned. Salt was rubbed on the skin of newborns to help protect and toughen the skin. And one who does not do this is seen as lacking compassion. We're responsible for welcoming our sisters, daughters, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, widows, singles, marrieds—every woman and just shaking it all over in eachother's presence. Our different strengths in the Spirit enrich us all. I need your salt and you need my salt. Our combined perfect blend of saltiness is like a 'Taste & See God's Goodness' overload for the world. When God's splendor gushes through us, women get this amazing outer beauty—like pregnancy glow. There's life being generated through you that causes hormones and body systems to do all kinds of things. Suddenly you've got beautiful nails, shine hair and glowing skin.

Often times we have enough assumed knowledge about God's word and how to encounter it together in deeper ways among women with in the body. But what about the world? Those who don't have the knowledge or guidance or even the desire to know the beauty of our God through Jesus Christ? We love through engaging them where they're at. For the world its all about outer beauty—looking the part. So, that's where we can start. If you know how to apply makeup or do hair, have you shaken that gift anywhere near a food bank, crisis pregnancy center or local shelter? Some congregations host free manicures for moms night. For me a MaryKay consultant hosted a party for the

tweens and teens at church. More than a decade later that beauty consultant is one of my dearest friends, she's old enough to be my mom, but we are friends and sisters in Christ.

This brings us to the Mascara Project. I empathize with women in tough situations because often beauty and outward grooming is put on the way back burner in the face of difficulties. Difficulties that last so long that one forgets they are beautiful or worse never even knew they were beautiful. My friend who at one point was just some woman who sold MaryKay became a real faith figure in my life and continues to be. What she's gifted me with is invaluable and she invited me with beauty. That gift should be passed on to those not at the center as an invitation to know and be a channel for God's splendor. I decided to shake it by becoming a consultant to give. I believe it's possible to extent that invite to 5,000 women through beauty. A woman can "donate" by purchasing cosmetics for a woman in a shelter, transitional home, crisis pregnancy center and the like as they move to new lives. There is no profit made. Cosmetics are purchased and disbursed. Anything that would be profit is donated to shelters and organizations who help women. You can get more information on donating or hosting a fundraiser event by contacting me through esams@marykay.com.

This was a lot of splendor to digest. Now I leave you with this: Can you imagine a kingdom where beauty comes from confidence in God through Jesus Christ instead of Anxiety over performing for the world? If yes, what can you do to shake your way towards that kingdom?