

## PRETTY IS AS PRETTY DOES

By Terri Ward

What is the definition of beauty? Is it visual pleasure, or rather as I've heard it said, "pretty is as pretty does".

Beauty has always been intriguing. I believe our natural attraction to beauty comes from God who created everything beautiful and values beauty highly. I read about a study involving infants who were exposed to visually attractive and non-attractive photos of people. The babies responded much more positively toward the attractive photos than to the unattractive ones. There is a place for visual beauty in the Christian world, but don't we often get out of balance in this area putting too much emphasis on the outward appearance of things?

The adornment of diamonds and pearls are not what make a hand *truly* beautiful, nor the appearance of youthful skin and well-manicured fingernails. What makes a hand *wholly* beautiful is what it does with its capabilities.

A hungry child finds relief from a hand stretched out with food

A broken body finds repair from a healing hand

A weary soul finds strength in the touch of a caring hand

A grieving heart welcomes comfort from a compassionate hand

The outer appearance is of little concern to those in need. So it is with other areas of our lives. Do we consider what the heart looks like in order to value its function? Do we care about the appearance of our inner ear before we are thankful for the ability to hear? What about the beauty of our inner organs? Does their appearance have anything

to do with the importance of their role in our lives? We're not concerned with what these look like because we don't see them on a daily basis, but their function is a matter of life and death. Shouldn't we give less importance and attention to external appearance and realize that true beauty goes beyond what you see to what you do.

When my children were young I would refer to bad behavior as "acting ugly", as they seemed to understand what the term ugly meant very early. It is important that we teach our children the difference between visual and functional beauty. In the mornings, do we teach them to prepare their spirits for the day ahead as well as their bodies? How about their bedtime habits – do they cleanse and rest their souls as well as their bodies? We must remember that as parents, our *actions speak louder than our words!* Our daily lives must be an example of Godly priorities. Do our children see us spending most of our time on outward or inward beauty? Spending time in God's presence is essential to beautifying our hearts. By receiving of His beauty, we then can share His beauty with others.

The visage of a violin or piano is not what makes the beautiful music we enjoy. Some of the most beautiful sounds I've ever heard came from an old, banged up instrument that wasn't much to look at. It is how the instrument responds to the touch of the hand that determines the enjoyment.

*Visual beauty brings momentary pleasure*

*Functional beauty has lasting positive effects*

It is the difference between visual and functional beauty. Of course, we *know* that function must come first. What good is a car if it won't start? What use is a refrigerator

if it doesn't cool? I'm fully aware that visual beauty has a role to play in the quality of our lives and the way others will respond to us, but I think we could all use a little perspective adjustment now and again. Are we spending too much of our lives on appearances? Keeping up with the Joneses? Making everyone and everything look good externally? What about considering instead how we look to the only One who holds our destiny in His hand, to the One who "looks not on the outward appearance, but looks into the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7) Let us consider whether we are beautiful in His sight.

In Matthew 23: 27,28 Jesus had a strong rebuke for the religious men who needed an attitude adjustment in this area. He said, "Woe to you hypocrites, which look beautiful outwardly, but are full of deadness and uncleanness. You look outwardly to be upright, but inside you are full of pretense, lawlessness and iniquity." *Symbol without Substance*. I must admit this is one of my pet peeves. Making it appear that you have something (symbol) when you really don't have the substance to back it up. It's not about what people *think* you are, it's about what you and God *know* you are.

Another good example of symbol without substance is found in Matthew 21:18. Jesus came upon a fig tree that was full of beautiful leaves. It looked like a good tree, but it was fruitless. It was a symbol without substance. It was visual but not functional, not fulfilling its destiny of providing nourishment. You know the story, Jesus was not pleased with the tree, cursed it and it immediately withered up!

Oh, the many things we can learn from this simple example. Lessons of being good stewards of our talents and abilities; of using them for the glory of God; of being faithful in all seasons; but especially of learning that outward appearance is of no value if we are not producing fruit to help others. A wise counselor once told me, "You can't

give what you don't have". In order for us to give good fruit, we must be filling ourselves continually with the *Fruit of the Spirit*. We cannot give anything of value out of our own flesh. Only in being filled with the Holy Spirit and partaking of the Lord's presence can we have substance to give others.

Now, remember, I am not saying we should not pay any attention to our outward appearance – we don't want to embarrass our families or draw attention to ourselves in the opposite extreme. I am talking about *balance*. Getting our priorities in order and putting more time and effort into the most important areas.

The next time you see a loving grandmother joyously serving her grandchildren, take a glance at her hands. Though they may be wrinkled, bony, bent and discolored, aren't they the most beautiful thing you've ever seen? Providing precious love and care beyond comprehension.

*Pretty is as pretty does!*