

Mother's Encouragement Group
October 9, 2014
The Keepers of Beauty

We have been in the middle of the series I have called “Plant Them and Let Them Grow,” discussing the “soil”—the Law of God—in which our children must be immersed or “planted,” if you will. But before going on to talk about the rest of the commandments, I want to suspend those considerations to talk about something that has become increasingly important in my thinking over the years, something that is being lost in our society and even lost in our churches, and that is the cultivation and celebration of beauty. At first blush (and I use the word advisedly!) you may think, “that’s not right; look at how beauty is worshiped and propounded in our society. All one has to do is go to the mall and check out the hundreds of dollars’ worth of cosmetics for sale, the clothes, the beauty shops, the nail salons, the shoe stores, the jewelers and so on. Our culture is doing nothing if it is not trying to sell us beauty.” True enough. And, we are supposed to live in opposition to our culture, aren’t we? How can we do that and still care about these things? That is a valid question which makes our decisions to buy or not to buy very subjective and sometimes very complicated. However, just because the world (by which I mean worldly people who do not have Christ in their lives) misuses the gift of beauty does not mean that Christians ought to repudiate it altogether. Indeed, one of the self-conscious purposes of education at Covenant College is to teach its students that Christians are meant to live in the world so as to redeem it, reclaiming it for Christ and His Kingdom. We ought not to be afraid to embrace the good, the beautiful, the lovely things this world has to offer—why should we when it is our God who made them all?

The difference is that we worship the Creator, not the created. Those who do not know Christ have nothing but themselves to care about, to worship, if you will. We know the difference, do we not? We are not in the business of worshiping beauty for its own sake but for the sake of giving honor and glory to our God—the God who made it in the first place. When I saw my first European cathedral with vaulted ceilings made of stone Gothic arches which were meant to draw the eye to the top and hold it there I was overcome with awe at the expression of the greatness, the “high-above-ness” of the God worshiped there; I know many of you have seen these things and been so overcome. Coming home after such an experience to the plain, short buildings we worship in—even sometimes gymnasiums—was jolting. But no, we must be careful that our buildings are not too beautiful because we might begin to worship the stones and not the Creator of them! (not that I’m bitter!)

When we repudiate things that are beautiful or even seek to downplay our own beauty, calling it nothing or as something less worthy or even as something sinful, we have thrown back in His face a gift that the Lord has given us. Ungrateful wretches! The Lord died to save us, body and soul. The Greeks thought that everything to do with the body was bad and evil and everything to do with the spirit was good. I was raised with this idea, though I believe unwittingly. The idea that a Christian girl should think about her appearance in an effort to make

it more lovely was frowned upon. Compliments about anything, but especially about our appearance, were rare since my parents (Rob's too) were afraid we might "get a big head." Our parents were inconsistent in this respect, because they loved and cared about beautiful things in many other ways and taught their children to do the same. (Rob's father was an accomplished pianist; his mother cared to set a beautiful table; my father-in-law loved to listen to opera and attend the symphony; my mother played the piano and organ, was a lovely singer; and so on). Of course, in regards to our persons, this is like walking a tight-rope trying not to give in to vanity while at the same time making the most of the Lord's gift to each of us. I have certainly experienced criticism from other Christians in my life for caring at all about my outward appearance. But is one's outward appearance any different—really—than any of the other personal gifts the Lord has given to each of us? But I digress...

My interest in the subject of beauty, as many of you know *who were there* at one time or another, grew out of my teaching of the Freshman Music Class at Covenant High School. In one of the first classes the students were asked to write a paragraph answering the question, "What is beauty?" and a second one answering the question, "What is beautiful music?" What I wanted was to plant the idea in the minds of those students that perhaps there might be something objectively true about beauty of all kinds and specifically about beautiful music. The hundreds of answers that came back typically included some form of the phrase, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," until I learned to forbid its use! After that came simply examples of beautiful things—sunsets on the mountains; sunrises over the ocean; a rose, a forest, stars in a night sky—but never really got to the heart of what made something beautiful. However charming and delightful CHS students are the typical 9th grader is not much of a philosopher! Still, if they had said that our Creator/God *made* all these things they would have been one step closer to the understanding of beauty. Beauty may be "in the eye of the beholder" but it is first in the mind of God. Does anyone remember the answer I gave you after you wrote your paragraphs? "Beauty is goodness experienced sensually," that is, through touch, taste, sight, smell or hearing. We then went to **Matthew 19:17** when Jesus says to the rich young ruler, "**Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter into life, keep the commandments.**" We can derive from this verse that our Creator/God and His Law is the source of all goodness and therefore of all beauty. Paul reminds us that "**Everything created by God is good....**" **I Timothy 4:4**. We read in **Genesis 1** over and over that God, after creating this or that, "**saw that it was good.**" In fact, the only thing about which God said "**It is NOT good**" was that the man was alone; Adam did not yet have his mate, his helper, and that, we know, God rectified right away! John Calvin's definition of beauty was, "The shining forth of the goodness and glory of God." He understood that the source of all goodness, and so all beauty, is God Himself.

When we talk about embracing beauty in our lives, exploring how it should and does affect us, how it ought to permeate our thinking and our doing, we are talking about living *sacramentally*—a philosophy of life certainly worthy of a Christian. A sacrament is "an outward

and visible sign of an invisible or inward and spiritual grace.” [OED] Our God made us physical as well as spiritual beings; He knows that we need physical realities to remind us of the truth of the spiritual and Heavenly ones. This is why baptism and communion are so important to growth as Christians: we see and feel the physical water that illustrates and represents the spiritual sign the Lord has placed on us and on our children; we taste, smell and touch the bread and wine in the Supper that illustrate and represent our Savior’s body and blood which He gave as a sacrifice—a guilt offering—for us. The Lord knows how important our bodies are to us—He made them, after all!—so He gave us sacraments that we might perceive with our bodies that which is spiritual in nature. A properly set Lord’s Table is beautiful in its simplicity, a pitcher, a cup, a plate—these are things that communicate to us the Lord’s love, sacrifice, and presence; they are the way our faith is nourished week by week. These things represent and convey to our minds the spiritual reality of the Lord’s presence and participation in our lives. *This is how we live in the world we can see and at the same time in the world we cannot see; rather, how the world we cannot see everywhere invades and shapes our thinking about, and affects our doing in, the world we see and live in every day. So we talk about beauty—God’s goodness—perceived, displayed and celebrated by His people and, specifically, by you and I.*

Oswald Chambers is a name you may know; he wrote one of the best known and loved devotional books, a page of instruction and inspiration for every day of the year, entitled *My Utmost For His Highest*. Chambers was a Scottish minister and evangelist who died at age 43 in Egypt during the First World War. Chambers’ wife was a woman named Gertrude, but everyone called her by the nickname, “Biddy.” Chambers once spoke about Biddy this way:

“As for Biddy, I love her and I am her husband but I do not believe it is possible to exaggerate what she has been *in the way of a Sacrament* out here -- God conveying His presence through the common elements of an ordinary life. The letters she has received from mothers and wives and sisters and fathers and brothers are in themselves a deep testimony to a most unconscious ministry of wife and mother and woman.” [*Abandoned To God*, p. 250-251.]

Oswald Chambers, by calling his wife “a sacrament”—like baptism or the Lord’s Supper—was saying that she made the invisible reality of God’s grace visible to others. She *embodied* grace and holiness, that is, she made it something that people could see and touch and hear. She was beautiful because holiness of life is beautiful, because love is beautiful, and because Jesus Christ is beautiful, and people could see all of that in her life.

Chambers knew what it was to combine the spiritual with the physical, to express one with the other. “‘When the heart sees what God wants,’ Oswald used to say, ‘the body must be willing to spend and be spent for that cause alone.’” [*Ibid*, p.20] Both his, and his wife’s, lives bear testimony to that conviction; Oswald’s writings survive today because of her self-sacrificing work to preserve them; he himself is revered, read and quoted because of his godly devotion to Jesus and because of his clear and thoughtful way of explaining the Christian faith. Their lives

were sacramental—and so beautiful—precisely because people could see what is supremely beautiful, Jesus Christ and his life, in theirs. That is beauty indeed because that is true goodness!

My challenge to us all today is to think carefully about how we can and ought to preserve and cultivate true goodness and beauty in our lives and in the lives of our children. I believe we have a particular and important role in this task that the Lord has given just to us. *We* are the keepers of beauty first of all because we are Christians and understand that human beings are drawn to beauty and why. What is it that makes human beings long for beauty? Evolution has no answer for this—whether it be flowers on the table or the overwhelming admiration of a clear starry night or the watching of a soccer game which, Rob tells me, is called “the beautiful game” (not *my* definition!). We understand that there is beauty everywhere and that we are not only drawn to it but have the capacity to be moved and captivated by it because we are ourselves the creation of the One who made all things “good”—that is, beautiful—to begin with, and who made us with that longing already there. *He made us in a way like Himself with souls that have lives of their own with their own inner longings, lives that will never cease to exist.*

Second, we are the keepers of beauty in a particular way because we are women. Go to the mall sometime and think about the Nordstrom floor plan: as you enter the store, to the immediate right shoes (heels, sandals, walking and running shoes, more heels); to the front left accessories, jewelry, cosmetics, perfume, then several departments of clothing including casual, dressy, sporty and lingerie—all for women. In the back left of the main floor, perhaps 1/4 of the space, are the men’s clothes. The back right quarter of the main floor is women’s clothing. The second floor is as large as the first but *it is all women’s clothes*. In other words, in this high end clothing store, 7/8 of the store is devoted to women. Men are virtually an afterthought! Why? Women were made to be looked at; the adornment of women in every culture is a matter of universal interest, of men and women alike. Women are looked at with an interest quite different from the way men are looked at. The business world knows this very well. Fortunes are made in women’s fashion; men’s fashion just makes people some money. The supermodels are all women, not men. (We know that our culture would love to change this and is trying very hard to do so but that is a subject for another time.)

Women are drawn to beauty and beautiful things more than men are (not that men are not) and women are often considered the caretakers of all things beautiful. True enough, many of the best musicians, artists and architects of the world have been—even are—men and in this, men have been the creators of beauty, leading where others have followed. In the history of art, music, architecture, even food, men have exercised creativity and leadership in bringing about many of the world’s most beautiful things. But I would venture to say that in the day to day caring of details it is women who mostly care about this, not men. I doubt very much that Ludwig van Beethoven could have kept a neat and beautiful house if his life depended on it or, for that matter, cared to trouble himself to beautify anything around him including his person. The beauty he pursued was in his own head (but what beauty it was!).

Think of how much beauty is added to human life because of the natural interest of women in all things beautiful. For example, have you ever seen a man beautifully wrap a gift for another man? If the world were populated only by men there probably wouldn't be such a thing as wrapping paper! Or think of one of the universally beautiful events in human life: a wedding. Everyone knows that weddings are women's affairs. They design them, they care about how things look, what the wedding party wears, about the flowers, the food, and the music (and unless you're a John Wykoff or a Tommy Lee you're quite content to let the women decide—about the music, that is!). I venture to say that if men were in charge of our wedding celebrations they would be much more Spartan affairs. I wonder if there would even be flowers, beautiful clothes or lovely things to eat. Would there even be cake? I don't know!

We know that God created women to be attractive to—and beautiful for—men. The Lord made Eve to be beautiful and attractive to Adam—his straight body to crave her curvy one! The Bible is full of compliments for female beauty—Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Abigail, Esther to name a few—are said to be “beautiful to look at.” Esther is even said to have taken a whole year of beauty treatments along with the other virgins who were being prepared to see the king. Lydia was a “**seller of purple**” and the **Proverbs 31** woman took care to clothe herself with “**fine linen and purple**” and then “**delivers sashes to the merchant.**” The Bible acknowledges the care and the invention that are invested in the adornment of female beauty. Particularly interesting, is that the Lord uses this custom of enhancing female beauty in the description of his own love for the church, his bride, in **Ezekiel 16**. There we read that the Lord Himself adorned His bride, making her beautiful for His own pleasure. The Bible never uses a similar image in respect to a man. Indeed, there is surely something very significant that the church is a bride, not a groom!

Or think of this, Jerusalem in its ideal form, heaven itself as it is described in **Revelation 21-22** is beautiful in every way: precious metals (gold especially), gems of every kind, a river running with clear water, lovely trees on each bank, and so on. Jerusalem is always a *she* in the Bible!

Third we are the keepers of beauty because we are the caretakers of the future, the nurturers of future generations of Christians. As mothers the most central goal of our lives is to draw our children further and further into the kingdom of God and what better way of doing that than by surrounding them with beauty of all kinds, making their lives full of the pleasure of beautiful sights, sounds, tastes, smells and textures. If we are drawn to what is beautiful we know good and well that our children are too.

We all know, don't we, that when children enter a beautifully appointed nursery with accessible toys all neatly stacked and put away they *love* to enter it and begin making messes everywhere; they are happy! Lazy mom that I was I tried this experiment with our play room when our kids were little. I thought, “Why should I bother cleaning this up every single day? It's just going to get messed up tomorrow!” So I didn't and guess what? My children really didn't like playing there the next day and grew tired of it almost immediately. Not a great decision for a

busy mom to make! When the Wykoffs' little Bryonie was three she already knew that she wanted to be beautiful; she didn't say those words, but she wanted to wear a dress every single day no matter what activity her mother had planned for her. Once she argued with her mother about having her hair cut because she wanted to "have hair like Rapunzel!"

We are bodies as well as souls and we live *sacramentally* in order to bring the spiritual reality to bear upon our physical lives. As we apply this thought to mothering our children we find that the way to a child's heart is also through his body—we need not to be afraid to spank that little bottom if the situation calls for it; we use pain of body to get to the soul. But we also need to be sure to be hugging that little body *all the time* with sweetness & affection, kissing, tickling, and holding firmly. This communicates to them our protection and love—something physical to communicate something spiritual. Lighting candles at dinner makes the meal more important, reminding us that the Lord is present even here, listening to our conversation with each other and waiting to take pleasure in our conversation with Him. What is this but "sacramental living?"

I want to put in here an argument for giving your children music lessons (you knew this was coming!). Of course you ought to have music of all kinds going on in your home; it is a way to affect the mood, the atmosphere in which things are done, a way to inspire happiness, to stimulate organized movement, to calm a distraught mind, to promote peace or to increase devotion in worship. Music can do all these things for the uneducated but even more so for the one who understands what is going on in that music and when skill is added to understanding it becomes a way to express that same happiness, sadness, melancholy or devotion. It is a way to develop that part of the brain that would otherwise lie dormant and by that means increase intelligence and creativity. Even non-Christians understand the power of music. The retiring president of Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa who is an accomplished Jazz musician was recently quoted as saying, "When music works, it's space travel. I lose myself in the sound."

You've heard me say this before, you graduates of Covenant High School: *everyone* has a gift for music, however small, even if it is only the gift of appreciation *and* if you never give a child lessons you will never know whether or not that gift might grow into something much bigger. We all know and love the Grosses—a family whose parents are both doctors—scientists—with almost no musical background who gave their two boys piano lessons. They kept them studying all the way through high school and found in each of them a beautiful skill and a growing love of music through that study. Suzan had this to say regarding her choice to keep the boys at their practice when they wanted to quit: "I had no idea the myriad (of) blessings music training gave to me as a parent in leading my children through life. I would definitely do it again because of the other life lessons, regardless of whether they could play well or not. What I most appreciate is the concrete example it offers me as a parent to teach them about diligence, patience, humility, doing something hard even when they don't want to, delayed gratification; worthwhile endeavors take a lot of work; you can't just immediately do something well because you like it or want to be good at it, etc. I'm sure there are other venues in life, such as sports,

which a parent can use to teach the same lessons, but music did not interfere with our dinner hour.”! She started Jonathan when he was four years old because it seemed right for a “well-rounded” education but kept both him and Spencer at it through “many tears” and desires to stop. But now Jonathan has chosen a career in Music Therapy “which is so perfectly suited to his skills and personality that, quite frankly,” says Suzan, “I’m in awe of God’s blessing on that!” What if she had allowed Jonathan to stop when the going got tough? He would not have learned the lessons she mentioned and neither would he be the beautiful pianist he is today.

Music enhances a Christian’s worship and again, the more understanding, the more the skill, the more appreciation as well as the better participation, that worshiper may offer the Lord. Once again we find that music was created by our Creator/God, made provision for and demanded a high standard of, its execution in His worship. **Genesis 4:21**—the Lord gave Jubal the talent to become “**the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe**”; **I Chronicles 25:6-8**—here the Lord appointed certain ones *who were especially skilled* to have the supervision of His temple worship, **Isaiah 6** and **Revelation 5:9 ff.**—here we see worship and singing in Heaven showing us that this is something our God loves; **Revelation 18:22**—here the argument is made in the negative: there will be no beautiful music in Hell. As His children and His worshipers it behooves us to bring our Lord the most pleasure in the most perfect way we possibly can. Our children will learn from our example what is important in life and in the worship of our God.

Music is a skill that is falling out of practice (no pun intended!) in our society and in our churches. More and more ministers are graduating from seminary with little or no musical knowledge and, as a result don’t know how to make intelligent judgments about the music in their worship services, leaving those decisions to the “music leaders” who often become the writers of the entire liturgy who, I might add, may or may not have the background and education needed to make wise and skillful decisions. Ministers have given up their role as “priest” for a number of reasons but one of them is certainly unfamiliarity with music history, biblical and otherwise, and a lack of understanding of styles and the skill required to execute them. Alice Parker, who partnered with Robert Shaw in arranging familiar folk hymns and spirituals beautifully and simply, said once that congregations are not learning to sing because no one is requiring it of them. It is the minister who knows at least the rudiments of music who would be able to do that because he would know that requiring a congregation to sing is oh so possible with education, inspiration and perseverance.

So, Girls, what if your sons should one day be called by the Lord into the ministry? Or what if your child has an amazing gift for performance in music? Don & Debbie Mellott are giving all their children lessons on violin or piano and neither of them have much in the way of musical background—Don not at all—and what do you know, they are all gifted—Benjamin was probably my brightest student. What if they had never given him a violin? I have had many students through the years and of none of them would I say it was a mistake to give lessons to. Some did not have much in the way of talent; some had no discipline or work ethic but all of them became better at what they were doing than when they began and if your son might one day

consider the ministry then you should be sure that he has the tools he needs to fulfill that calling and so providing for the deepening of the next generation's worship of our God.

Only a personal God, who is Himself beautiful, who made us "in His own image," that is, to be like Him and to long for all that reflects His likeness, can answer the "why" of our longing for beauty. Even God's book, our Bible, is full of statements put in poetic and beautiful ways. Take, for example, the passage in **Isaiah 52:7**: "**How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'**" It is not the feet of the one bringing the news but the news itself that is beautiful which Isaiah says not once but four times, increasing the intensity of his meaning. Put this way, the mind is engaged and the soul is lifted to embrace the loveliness of the Gospel. So, if God is beautiful and He planted a longing for all things beautiful in us, then we know that beauty is good and to long for it is a right and holy thing.

Look at **Ezekiel 16**. This is the Lord talking to Israel, His specially chosen people: "**When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head....And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.**" vss. 8-14. This is a lovely picture of God celebrating and describing the delight he finds as a husband in the beauty of his wife. He showers her with presents to enhance her loveliness.

The rest of the story is not so fun, however, since that same bride the Lord had prepared for Himself did not use her beauty to please Him but began to love her beauty for its own sake, loving the admiration of other lovers and forgetting the one she was bound to by the vows that had passed between them. And so we remind ourselves what it is that is prized above all, that the Bible lifts up over and over again as that which ought to be sought after and cultivated more than the outward, that which a woman may have all her life when her outward beauty has faded with age, that which any woman, no matter what her outward appearance may be, may have. (Simone Weil, the French Jewess philosopher and late Christian convert was a very plain woman. She once remarked: "A beautiful woman, looking at her image in the mirror thinks that the image is herself; a plain woman knows it is not!" That is, a plain woman is not as tempted as a beautiful one to mistake the outward for the eternal.)

So what is this inner beauty? Is it not true goodness perceived in the way the senses can perceive it? The Bible calls holiness beautiful; every Christian is called to be holy—both men

and women—but women have a particular calling to be beautiful in this way too. In **Proverbs 31** and the famous description of the virtuous woman that we find there, we find a woman who appreciates fine things, dresses herself well and her children in scarlet—this is a woman of means, of course—but she is also celebrated for her wisdom and her industry, her commitment to her family, her hard work. But at the end of that text, and as the climax of it, she is described as someone who **“feared the Lord”** which is obviously the highest compliment that can be paid to her. Because of this, we read of her at the end, **“Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting *but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.*”** Her goodness is visible to others, but her deepest beauty is all that reflects her faith in God and her commitment to living her life to his praise. I think if we stop to think about it, we would say that the most beautiful lives we know are not those of very attractive women who wear very attractive clothes and style their hair in very attractive ways, but are women whose *lives are beautiful because there is so much of the loveliness of God in them.*

I know a woman whom I have known and loved for a long time and have thought of as beautiful, though she has never had what I would call good looks; she is old now and what outward loveliness she had has faded. Though she is not very pretty, when I am with her I do not think of that—in fact never occurs to me to think of that—because she is such a kind, loving person whose conversation is always about the Lord, always uplifting, always interested in others. She is beautiful because she is good. She was always a hard-worker, she always cared about others, her home was always open to others, she was unfailingly cheerful, she bore the difficulties of life with grace and patience as a Christian should, she enjoyed a good laugh -- indeed, as godly a woman as she is, we laugh and laugh whenever we are together—her marriage, before her husband died, was a wonderful example to multitudes of people of happy faithfulness. She had no children of her own, but made sure that she had hundreds of children in other ways. Such goodness, such beauty cannot be ignored. There are hundreds of people all over the world who love her for the example she set, the love she gave, the practical help and encouragement that she was always willing to give. She was never what we call a “looker,” but everyone always “looked” to her and virtually everyone who has ever known her admires her. *That’s beauty.* I come away from being with her encouraged and strengthened in my determination to love and serve Christ. She is beautiful! Our own Lord is spoken about in **Isaiah** this way: **“...He had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him” Isaiah 53:2** and yet he was the epitome of a beautiful man.

Summing up: it is important for Christians, and especially for Christian women, to make themselves as beautiful as may be, both inside and out. This is not only a reflection and an honoring of the way God made us—to be keepers of beauty—but it is a form of hospitality and kindness to others. One spends time in the morning preparing oneself for the day, looking carefully to see that what you are presenting to the world is pleasant, modest, well-put-together and as pretty as possible given what the Lord has given you in the way of a “canvas.” But when you go away from that mirror you should forget about it, trusting that you have done the work

you should have done. Now the job is to think of others, making your spirit and your demeanor as welcoming and winsome as your appearance. You have not dressed to win compliments from others but to please the Lord and to be winsome for Him. This is lovely, Christian, femininity.

Making yourself as beautiful as possible will turn your husband's eyes back to yourself over and over again with lovely pleasure. Add to that the inner beauty of kindness, forgiveness and self-control and you have the makings of a beautiful marriage. The Bible makes a point of celebrating the attractiveness of women to men. **Deut. 21:10-14**: these men had no idea what the character of these women was like, what their skills were or whether or not they had a sense of humor, but only *that they were beautiful*. Men enjoy the attractiveness of their wives; it is not virtue to withhold from them that pleasure. What attracted them to you in the first place should continue to attract them to you. The mistake of so many marriages is to take for granted what you thought so important at the outset; to stop caring to do the things you did at first.

Making a beautiful home for your family will “adorn” the Gospel and make it attractive to your children; they will grow up with loveliness and pleasure and because they did they will be glad to embrace the Truth for themselves. If our body is the “temple,” the “home,” for the Holy Spirit then the brick, stucco or wooden houses that we live in are the “temples,” the “homes,” for our families. Just as a happy marriage provides an underlying joy and pleasure in the relationships of a family, so the beauty of the home provides a desirable place for the children to be, a place where, when they are older, they will be happy to come back to. This is also a way to distinguish yourselves from the World around you. In our neighborhood it is obvious which folk care about making their homes beautiful and which ones actually seem to seek to tear things down. When our children were little we were surrounded by disorder in varying amounts, ugliness and trash mixed with irresponsible behavior but when our children entered the privacy of our home we worked hard at making it a place of order and beauty. It was easy for me to talk to them about the difference between Christians and unbelievers because it was so obvious on the outside. In prettier neighborhoods the differences are not so easy to see and are more subtly discerned.

There are many Christians whose lives are “gray” when they ought to be filled with color; they are boring when they ought to be filled with all kinds of wonderful, interesting things. Did God stop creating with only one kind of tree? Do any two snowflakes look alike? And yet there are millions of them! So every person God made is unique and wonderful and every friendship too has its own character and blessing. We, as God's own children, ought to embrace every kind of outer beauty we can find and cultivate every kind of inner beauty that He has shown us and in this way we will bless the Church and make her members strong and lovely, shining its light clearly and beautifully in the World.