

What does God see in you?

Message for Sunday, August 19, 2018
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:6-7; Galatians 3:26-27

Terry O'Reilly, who presents the fascinating radio show on CBC called "Under the Influence" tells about the time the Dove brand of cosmetics did a complete about face in its marketing. It was 2007, and this is what their advertising agency, Ogilvy & Mather, came up with.

Show *Evolution* video:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf46U. In the video, a normal woman is transformed by professional makeup artists, and then further altered by Photoshop, to become a completely unrealistic and unattainable image of beauty. The point they were making: no wonder our perception of beauty is distorted.

This was extraordinary, because for decades Dove had been part of the industry which produced these false images. Ogilvy & Mather did a survey which found that only 9% of women considered themselves attractive. And 68% said that media and advertising showed a standard of beauty that most women could never achieve. So how did the agency persuade Dove to abandon their strategy which had earned billions of dollars in sales and profits?

Most of the Dove executives were men. Ogilvy & Mather contacted the daughters of those men. They interviewed them, and filmed them talking about images of women in the media, and how those images made them feel imperfect. They could never think of themselves as beautiful; only unworthy. Then in a meeting with the Dove executives, the agency showed those videos of their daughters. The effect was devastating. The Dove executives agreed to completely drop all their previous advertising, and adopt the "Real Beauty" campaign.

Here's another video which was part of their new advertising:

You're more beautiful than you think:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpaOjMXyJGk. In this video, an artist drew pictures of women according to how they described themselves. Then the artist drew pictures of the same women according to how someone else described them. In

every case, the second drawings were both more accurate and more pleasant.

Dove is onto something important here. But in the end, they're still in the business of selling products whose sole purpose is to change one's appearance to something that our culture tells us we're supposed to look like. What God teaches us in the Bible tells the rest of the story.

God told the prophet Samuel that one of Jesse's sons would be the next king of Israel. Samuel looked them over, and was immediately impressed by one of them.

1 Samuel 16:6-7, Good News Bible:

When they arrived, Samuel saw Jesse's son Eliab and said to himself, "This man standing here in the Lord's presence is surely the one he has chosen." But the Lord said to him, "Pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I have rejected him, because I do not judge as people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart."

If God held a beauty contest, a person's looks would count for zero points. You could spend tens of thousands of dollars on creams to erase wrinkles, Botox to make your lips look bigger and cosmetic surgery to make your hips look smaller, and fabulous outfits by Giorgio Armani, and it would all be worthless.

These are some of the heroes of the Bible:

- Moses was a great leader, transforming a bunch of slaves into a great nation;
- Ruth was faithful to her mother-in-law, to the point of leaving her own family;
- Mary said "Yes" to God, knowing it would change her life;
- Peter trusted Jesus enough to walk on water, and Jesus called him "the Rock."

All these people are beautiful in God's eyes, but we know nothing at all about their physical appearance.

<p>Table talk: Describe one quality or virtue about someone whom you admire. In other words, what makes that person attractive?</p>
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The Bible describes some of those virtues that we are to live by:

- In Matthew 5: poor in spirit; meekness; hunger for righteousness; merciful; pure in heart; peacemaker; persecuted because of righteousness and because of following Jesus.
- In Romans 12: love; devoted; zealous; joyful; patient; faithful; generous; hospitable; forgiving; humble.
- and many more places, but you get the idea.

In what I've been saying, I'm teetering on the edge of sounding like I'm saying that God loves us because we are such good people. So let me add a bit more to balance out the picture.

Yes, it is true that God loves us. But it's not because we're such good people. The truth is, even though we've done some wonderful and beautiful things, there is a lot of ugliness in our lives. The Bible calls that "sin." The wonderful, amazing, beautiful truth is that God loves us even in spite of that sin. In fact, Jesus came to show us in person God's love. When we surrender our lives to Jesus and follow in his way, then our sins are forgiven; we are washed clean.

Galatians 3:26-27, Good News Bible:

It is through faith that all of you are God's children in union with Christ Jesus. You were baptized into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ himself.

Can you picture that? You are clothed with the life of Christ. Instead of wearing some designer outfit by Armani, we wear Jesus. It's because of Jesus in our life that God sees us as beautiful.

Yes, we live by those virtues, but the key is the reason why. It's *not* to earn God's love. It's the *result* of God's love.

<p>Table talk: What is it like to experience grace—undeserved love? How does it make you feel, to know that God loves you <i>just the way you are</i>?</p>

Next Steps:

- See yourself as God sees you. That is, forget the mirror. See the inner goodness and beauty.
- Especially, above all else, see Jesus in you. Give thanks for God's amazing love.
- This week, tell other people about the beauty you see in them. Make someone's day!