



## BEAUTY RECLAIMED

This lesson focuses on beauty through ritual as an enhancer of joy.

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## Enhancer of Joy

Beauty

## Duration

60 minutes

## Lesson Developed by

Rev. John D. Leedy

## Goal

Exploring the connections between ritual and vocation in the joyful experience of Divine beauty

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## Tips to Prepare

Take time to reflect on moments in your own life where you encountered God through beauty. Where and how did those moments come about? Was it in nature? In an art museum? Listening to music? A sacred moment with a loved one? What words would you use to describe those experiences? What new insight did you discover about God? How were you inspired by that experience of beauty? Being able to reflect and articulate your own experiences will allow you to speak authentically about them with the youth and empower them to reflect theologically on their own.

## Materials Checklist

- Bible
- Ritual material

- Paper & Pens
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## Setting the Atmosphere

As this lesson is about beauty, aesthetics are important. The space should feel warm, open, and intentional. This lesson is also adaptable for a peaceful outdoor setting. In either setting, encourage the youth to silence and put away their phones or devices.

**Opening Ritual:** Before the youth enter the space, either indoors or out, create a ritual focal point in the center of the area. Spread out a piece of beautiful fabric on the ground. Position a few small pieces of printed or framed art or icons on easels in the center of the fabric. The art or icons may be modern or traditional or ancient – either way, ensure they relate in some way to one another. Then add additional related elements to the ritual focal point. For example, if the works of art are all nature related, add a potted plant or pine cones, a basket of soil or a scattering of leaves or stones. If the art and icons depict the ocean or the disciples on a boat, add a clear bowl of water, a scattering of sand and shells, or fish netting. If the icons depict saints or biblical stories, add votive candles or a standing cross, an open Bible, or have a stick of frankincense burning. If the works of art are modern or abstract, add a string of lights or crack a few neon glow sticks, prop up a few small frameless mirrors or a scattering of colorful sea glass. However the ritual focal point is designed, make sure it is evocative and centering so that the eye recognizes it as something beautiful and intentional. Leave plenty of space around the ritual focal point for teens to sit.

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## Scripture Focus

Psalm 8

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## Purpose

This lesson is designed to empower teens to reclaim beauty as an attribute of the divine and to open up their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual sensibilities to encountering God through beauty. For the purposes of this lesson, beauty is not to be confused with superficial

prettiness, but rather should be defined as those experiences that captivate and transport us beyond the realm of the immediate and mundane and into a place of joy and awe. Giving teens the tools to identify and embrace immanent beauty makes space for the transcendent beauty of God to form their lives into the image of Christ, the incarnate beauty.

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## Objectives

In this session, leaders will help teens redefine and reclaim the theological concept of beauty apart from a culture that weds superficial notions of artificial beauty to consumerism and status. Beginning with an opening ritual, leaders will demonstrate how ordinary moments can become touch points for encountering beauty in God and one another through ritual and purpose. During the engagement and reflection activities, youth will begin to develop language to describe moments of beauty, as well as experiencing how participation in the beauty of God enhances the joy of life by uncovering a deep well of delight and awe. In the sending activity, youth will channel these concepts into becoming agents of lived beauty in service to Christ in the world.

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## Gather

### **Gather (5 minutes)**

As youth enter the area, greet each of them at the entrance in this way: *“Child of God, welcome. I see the image of God in you. Please find a place to sit around the circle.”* This may seem a bit odd or jarring to the youth as they are welcomed one by one, but allow the moment to do its work and be awkward if it needs to.

Once the teens are gathered around the ritual space, ask them to put away their phones or devices and begin to breathe deeply and slowly. After a few moments of centering breathing, ring a chime or light a candle to open the holy space – a space in the service of God and set apart from all other spaces for a time. Ask the youth to take a full minute in silence to simply explore the space with their eyes. After the minute has passed, ask the youth to describe what they saw using single emotion words (happy, sad, excited, peaceful, anxious, etc.). It may take them a few moments in silence to connect the physical sensory input with an emotional response. Again, allow the moment to do its work.

After the youth have shared, offer this prayer: *Ever-Creating God, thank you for creating this world and calling it good. In your image we were made in all our wonderful diversity. In your image of love, of joy, of imagination, and of beauty you fashioned us from nothing more than dust and breath and called us very good. In these moments together, we ask that your Spirit dwell in us, as individuals and as this youth group, that we may see your image in one another, in ourselves, and in the world around us. Guide us in the way of Jesus Christ and form us into his image, your image that came down to earth to point our eyes toward heaven. Amen.*

Following the prayer, ask the youth to get up and greet each other using the same words of welcome they received at the door. Be ready to remind them of the words should they ask.

**Introduction of the Session:** Once the youth have returned to their seats around the space, open a brief time of conversation like this: Today's lesson is about beauty. Who can give us some examples of things that we typically think of as beautiful?

How do you know something is beautiful when you see it (or experience it)?

Is there a difference between something being beautiful and something being pretty?

Too often, beauty and prettiness are confused. Prettiness is surface-level; something made up or staged to draw a person's attention and make them feel a certain way. This is how advertising works. People, products, and lifestyles are staged or superficially manipulated to capture your interest and create desire within you. Can you think of an example of this?

Beauty on the other hand is different. Beauty goes deeper than the surface-level stuff we see in commercials that is designed to momentarily snare our senses. Beauty connects us with something greater than ourselves because beauty creates both desire and, more importantly, joy. When we see or experience something beautiful, it not only draws us in (desire), but also fills us with delight (joy). For some of us, visiting an art gallery or watching a movie or listening to a favorite song may evoke a sense of beauty as we are simultaneously drawn into the world that the artist or musician has created and filled with joyfulness. For others of us, beauty might be observed in the wonders of nature or in scientific exploration. Our imagination, intellect, and sense of adventure are all pathways that allow beauty to draw us in and fill us with awe and wonder. For others of us, we might experience beauty in our relationships with loved ones or strangers we meet. Still others might experience beauty in the written word, or in good food, or in bodily movement. There are many ways that people encounter beauty? Would any of you like to share moments where you have experienced beauty - remembering that beauty both draws us in and fills us with joy?

When we think about all the diverse ways humans experience beauty, we begin to see a pattern emerge. Each of these pathways of beauty contains some form of ritual and imparts some sense of purpose. Ritual draws us in, sparks interest and a desire to participate, and creates enchantment. Whether it's packing a backpack and tent to go into nature, sitting in a favorite chair to read, practicing a dance or piece of music over and over, or even utilizing the scientific method, ritual is the thing that draws us toward beauty. In the experience of beauty, we are filled with joy - a joy that nudges us toward a purpose. Perhaps experiencing joy in the beauty of a work of art inspires you to take up painting or drawing yourself, or to want to share the work of art with those who haven't seen it. Or if you've been filled with joy walking

through a beautiful forest, you might be convicted to help protect and conserve the environment. Perhaps you've delighted in a scientific discovery and been filled with a passion to learn more or seek to apply your discovery to help others. No matter how you experience beauty, there will always be some ritual that draws you in and fills you with joyful purpose.

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## Engage

### **Engage (30 minutes)**

#### **Activity 1:** Drawing Near to Beauty in Ordinary Ritual

Ask the youth to come up with a ritual around a mundane, every day experience that the vast majority of them are likely to experience in common. (Think brushing teeth or doing homework.) The ritual should include the following ingredients:

The setting or preparation of a space,

Any special words, movements, or songs that are used,

An accounting of who is involved in the ritual and what parts they play,

How the ritual begins, is performed, and ends.

The youth may divide up into small groups to think through each of these ritual ingredients. If the youth struggle to visualize the activity, remind them of the components of the opening ritual that began the session. After a few minutes, have the youth present the various parts of the ritual, and if possible, enact it.

#### **Activity 2:** Drawing Near to Beauty in Extraordinary Ritual

Ask the youth to design a ritual around a significant life experience or participation in a hobby. Offer suggestions like getting a driver's license, climbing a mountain, going off to college, or performing in a major music recital or sporting event. Have them craft the ritual using the same ingredients as before. The youth may divide into small groups for this activity as well. After a few minutes, have the youth present the various parts of the ritual, and if possible, enact it.

#### **Activity 3:** Drawing Near to Beauty in Sacred Ritual

For this version of the same activity, ask the youth if they would rather create a ritual around a passage of Scripture, a liturgical celebration, or moment in worship. Suggestions might include the first Sunday of Advent or Lent, a late evening or night service on Holy Saturday

before Easter Sunday, the Passing of the Peace, Baptism or Communion, or Bible stories like Exodus 12:1-18, Leviticus 25:8-17, Psalm 8, Matthew 14:13-21, John 12:1-7, or John 21:1-19. Have them craft the ritual using the same ingredients as before. The youth may divide into small groups for this activity as well. After a few minutes, have the youth present the various parts of the ritual, and if possible, enact it.

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## Reflect

### **Reflect (20 minutes)**

**Discussion:** Filled with Joyful Purpose by Beauty

Ask the youth to think back to the ordinary ritual they created. What was it about that ritual that drew them in or inspired them to want to participate in it? How did the ritual change the experience of the ordinary, everyday thing? How would they think differently about that ordinary thing if they were to perform that ritual every time?

Now ask the youth to think back to the extraordinary ritual they crafted. How did that ritual wrap additional meaning around that special experience? How did the ritual add a deeper dimension of joy or fullness to the moment? How do you think that this ritual might inspire a more powerful experience of the moment?

Finally, ask the youth to remember the sacred ritual they designed. Did the experience of the story, celebration, or moment change when it was accompanied by ritual? How so? Was the ritualized experience of the story, celebration, or moment more engaging or less engaging? How did the ritual help engage your mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual senses? Where did you see beauty in this story, celebration, or moment? How did this experience of beauty inspire you? What do you feel called to do with this?

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## Send Forth

### **Send Forth (5 minutes)**

**Sum-It-Up:** As you prepare to end the session, ask the youth to return to their seats on the

floor around the ritual focal point. Ask them to remember how they felt when the session was begun with ritual. Confused? Intrigued? Curious? Ask them to remember how they felt when they were greeted as children of God and how they felt to have the image of God affirmed in each of them. Ask: What would the world be like if we carried that ritual greeting with us? Would other people be drawn to that energy? Would other people desire to be greeted and known with such dignity and respect? Do you think you would be more aware of the beauty within each person? Do you think life would be more joyful if everyone were to acknowledge the image of God, the beauty of God, in all people? How would we treat each other differently if we affirmed the image of God, the beauty of God in every person we met?

**Closing Prayer:** For the closing prayer, ask the teens to stand and go around the room and say to each other, “Child of God. I see the image of God in you. Go in peace.”