

Days^{of} Hope

Passionately communicating the love of God to hurting kids in a gentle way

My Favorite Dysfunction

by Jon Wells

Gerry was a hot mess. (name changed to protect identity) When I met him, Gerry was a gangly 18-year-old teen with the mind of a 13-year-old. Gerry's family was monumentally unstable, and he had been pulled from his home at a young age. Gerry had been raised in residential facilities all across the state. Just as soon as he would complete one program, he was shuffled off to another one. Gerry was known as a 'runner.' He was a nice enough kid, and seemed to get along with people OK. He wasn't necessarily explosive or super aggressive, but Gerry had a real problem with running away. At the slightest hint of an opportunity, that kid would take off sprinting like an Olympic athlete. By the time our paths crossed, Gerry had a lengthy history from dozens of different facilities as a 'flight risk.' His impulse to flee became the real reason why he never could function in a foster home, a public school, or any 'normal' setting. I never did understand exactly where Gerry was heading, why he was running, or where he thought he might go. I'm not sure that he ever really thought about it either, he just liked to take off. I remember one afternoon when the boys were out playing basketball in the yard, I heard Gerry yell over his shoulder.

"See ya suckers!" I glanced up just in time to see Gerry's profile as he ran off into the woods behind the building. The veteran staff member who was standing by me just shook his head.

"I remember when that boy was eight years old, he was living over in the cottage across the street," the staff member said. "He took off running into the woods one day and we found him hung up in a thorn bush about 100 yards down that way. He had jumped off the hill and never landed, suspended himself in the branches. When we found him his legs were churning but his feet weren't touching the ground. That boy never has learned how to stop running."

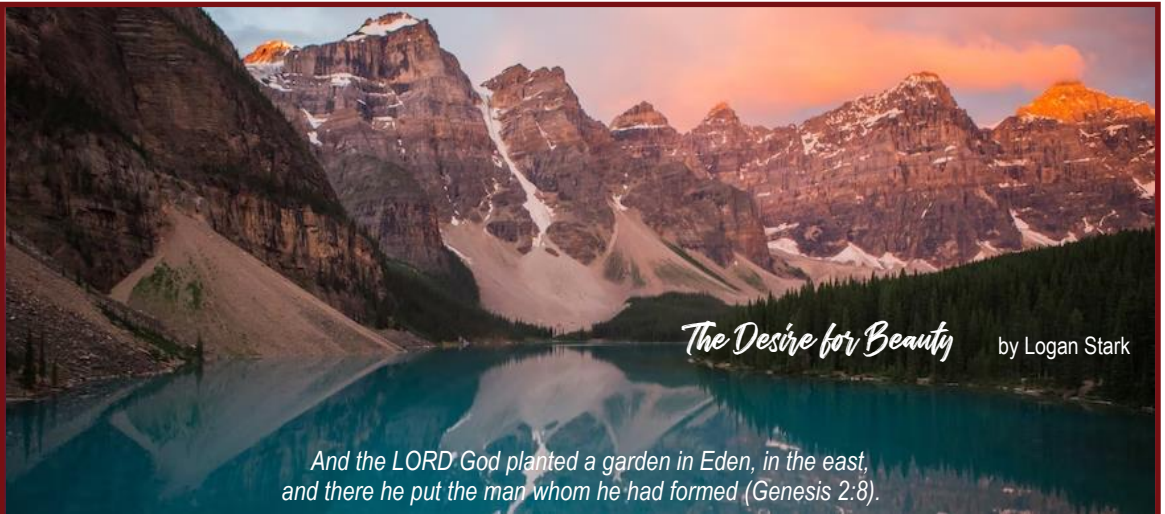
A few months later I found myself taking Gerry down to the courthouse to see the judge who had jurisdiction over his case. This young man was well over 18 years of age, and the state had no interest in paying the expensive check attached to his care. He was going to age out of the system, whether he had grown up or not. Sure enough, after a few formalities the judge declared Gerry to be fully independent and under his own recognizance. The judge addressed Gerry's biological mother who had come to see the proceedings, encouraging her to try and help him as much as she was able.

As we walked out of that courthouse that day, the sun was shining brightly, and Gerry was so happy. His mother and I decided to take him out for a celebratory lunch. Just as we hit the sidewalk, Gerry took off at a fast sprint, running down the main street of that small town.

"I'm outta here!" he yelled. His mother sighed.

"Well, there he goes." She shook her head.

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The Desire for Beauty by Logan Stark

*And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east,
and there he put the man whom he had formed (Genesis 2:8).*

A sunset. A rainbow. Flowers. Stars. Butterflies. Women. Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. Michelangelo’s David. What do these things have in common? Beauty.

It’s a part of human nature to desire beauty. You see, the Bible begins with, “In the beginning.” In the beginning God created. He created the heavens and the earth. Not only does the Bible start with the very beginning of time and existence, but it starts with a description of how God created the universe. Within seven days, He creates everything. He designs stars and whales. He fills the skies and floods the oceans with life. Instead of creating just one type of tree and one kind of flower He creates thousands. He could have made a world of gray but instead He fashions a world bursting with color. He fills the earth with design, complexity, and variety. And on the sixth day, He creates His masterpiece:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them (Genesis 1:26-27).

On day six, God creates man and woman in His image. He then blesses them and puts them into the garden which He has planted for them—the Garden of Eden. He gives the man and woman stewardship over this beautiful place. For a time, they live in paradise. But eventually, the man and the woman chose to sin. They are cursed and cast out of Eden.

* * *

I believe we can glean two possible reasons from the first three chapters of Genesis why the human heart desires beauty. The first is because we desire a return to Eden. Unfortunately, we live in a cursed world; a place of sin, corruption, and brokenness. A world where rape and war exist. Perhaps a part of us knows that this world isn’t right, which is why we yearn to return to paradise.

The second possible reason is perhaps because of our Imago Dei. We are made in the image of God. And God created a world of beauty. True, the world He created has been tainted by sin, but He still preserved beauty in a fallen world, perhaps as a way to woo us to Him. Such as a man presents a bouquet of flowers to a woman, so too does God present us with rainbows and butterflies. Perhaps the part of us which desires beauty is that part which is made in the image of God. We desire what He created.

For one reason or another, we are created to appreciate beauty. Whether that be our desire to return to Eden or to be wooed by God, who can say? Whatever the reason, I would like to encourage us not to ignore this Godly passion. Take the time to appreciate the beauty around you. For God has given us much to be desired, even within a cursed world.



My Favorite Dysfunction continued . . .

“Gerry! Hey Gerry, where are you going?” I shouted after him. The boy had already crossed the street and covered about a block when he stopped to look back at us.

“Why are you running? Who are you running from? Nobody is chasing you anymore!”

Gerry wheeled around and dashed out of sight. That’s the last time I ever saw that young man. I never did hear what happened to him. He had aged out of the system, and the state had quit looking for him. I hope he landed on his feet somewhere, but I have no idea.

The sad truth is, Gerry had one really broken way of dealing with his problems. He would just run. If he had ever figured out how to face that issue and deal with it, his whole life would’ve changed. But for as long as I knew him, Gerry never really would deal with that core dysfunction. He was blind to it, unable to see how much damage it was doing. I will never forget that ridiculous moment when he ran away from the courthouse and no one was chasing him. But in his brokenness, he could not understand that simple truth.

Just about everybody I have ever met has at least one really broken, dysfunctional way of coping with the world they live in. (Some of us have more than one) I don’t know that I’ve ever met anyone who did not have a favorite dysfunctional tendency. The Biblical term for these broken ways of coping is sin. There are a million different versions of sin but all of them lead down the same path. Scripture is clear on this issue. ‘The wages of sin is death’. The kind of death you suffer depends on the kind of sin you prefer. Some folks mismanage their money. If you are a gambling addict or a shopaholic and you burn through the rent money, you will end up in a state of financial death. It’s called bankruptcy. If you sin with your mouth; you lie constantly and deceive people, everyone will come to know that you are a liar and your words are of no value. No one will trust you. The very words you speak will be dead. If you sin relationally against your friends- gossiping, betraying, manipulating, or backstabbing others, your relationships will die. Relational death is called loneliness. If I go out and cheat on my wife I will reap a consequence of marital death- It’s called divorce. If I allow my gluttony to dictate my diet, and spend my life eating cheeseburgers and cheesecake, all of those broken eating habits will catch up to me. I will suffer a health crisis like diabetes, heart disease, and the like. Some struggle with more obvious addictions like alcoholism or drug issues. Some folks have crippling rage that erupts and destroys relationships. Some people battle demons of pride, gossip, laziness, or violent outbursts. It is not just kids like Gerry who live in residential facilities that carry the burden of sin. Romans chapter three tells us that all of us struggle in some way; no exceptions. Like Gerry, we seem generally blind to our own dysfunction. I minimize it; I rationalize the ways in which my favorite broken habit is insignificant. I tell myself *my little dysfunction is not really that big of a deal*.

If Gerry had at some point been willing and able to face his brokenness and grow out of it, his entire life would have changed. He would not have spent his childhood institutionalized. Absent that insipid impulse to run away, Gerry would likely have landed in a foster home somewhere, attending public school and enjoying a more ‘normal’ life. Instead he burned his first eighteen years bouncing from one program to another, never settled, never sure where he was headed next.

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DAYS OF
HOPE



Program Director
Jon Wells
jon@daysofhope.net



Chaplain
Sean Wilson
Sean@daysofhope.net



Chaplain
Logan Stark
Logan@daysofhope.net



Treasurer
Jo Ann Davidson
joann@daysofhope.net

Visit us Online!



www.daysofhope.net

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PO BOX 12
St. James, MO 65559
573.578.3259

My Favorite Dysfunction continued . . .

I suppose it would be worth the effort to imagine how life might change if I abandoned my favorite dysfunction. Perhaps, like Gerry, I am completely unable to envision what my life might look like without the shadow of my own brokenness cast across it. This is a point where I invite God into the equation. He does not share in my blindness. He sees clearly how my brokenness is affecting my life, and He sees plainly the paths of healing that lead out of the broken places. What would life look like without my broken ways of coping?

God, give me a vision of a life unhampered by my favorite sins!

For over 15 years, Days of Hope has been bringing the good news of the gospel to the thousands of at risk youth. We continue to insist that God's solution to all of the innumerable challenges these youth face is found in the person of Jesus Christ. We are inter-denominational seeks to address the



a not for profit, Christian ministry that spiritual needs of children and teens who are living in residential psychiatric care facilities throughout central Missouri. We are supported by the prayer and gifts of individuals and churches in our community. Through the ministries that are offered at Days of Hope, Bibles are distributed, pastoral counsel, services, and groups are provided, and these children are given an opportunity to respond to the gospel message.