

Food for Thought—Consider the Lilies and the Stars



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When Jesus spoke, he sometimes used straight-up teaching, he sometimes told stories, he sometimes used rhetorical questions, he sometimes used analogies with simple but powerful imagery from the agrarian world (harvests, sheep, vineyards), daily life (a lost coin, lighting a lamp, dough and bread), and from the natural world (lilies, ravens, stars, rain and sun). I'd like to look at one aspect of the natural world which reveals something about God that is important—its beauty. It may sound ridiculous and obvious, yet I think somehow it is not.

Jesus said that wildflowers are more beautifully clothed than Solomon was at the height of his glory (and Jesus would know). And when we reflect for a moment, we can see that this is so. God lavishes this beauty upon green plants—from grasses to trees. The work these plants do is very important. They are responsible for the food we eat—all the grains, all the fruits and vegetables, and even, indirectly, the meat (for the animals we eat either eat plants or eat animals that eat plants). They also take in the carbon dioxide we breathe out and produce the oxygen we breathe in. Without flowering plants, we could neither eat nor breathe. They are crucial to our survival. God made them to be the providers for life on this earth. But He also made them beautiful. Think of the world's violets, magnolias, cherry blossoms, blooming pear trees, larkspur, phlox, and pinks, vervain and baby's breath, dogwoods and redbuds. God could've made all of these produce the food and oxygen we need without also making them beautiful. But He *chose* to make them beautiful as well. He does this sort of thing over and over in his creation. He made water, which can be argued to be the most vital thing on earth. But he could've made it without making it able to reflect the sky and without making it produce the lovely sound it makes when it flows over rocky stream beds. We need the sun for light, heat, and photosynthesis. Without it, there would be no life here. But the Lord didn't have to make the sunrises and sunsets works of art or even make us able to see them. He could have arranged the cosmos in such a way that there would be no stars in the night sky. But He did make it such that there are stars in the night sky. And He could've made them such that they would have a place in physics, but he didn't have to make them capable of filling us with wonder. But He did. He chose to.

There are many things in the natural world which remind us of its fallen-ness, and those things too are instructive. They remind us of the ways things should not be and of the ugliness of sin and its capacity to distort. But even in this corrupted, fallen world, God has left us many flashes of beauty, and by it our spirits can be refreshed. Beauty is one of the things that punctuates our days and nights with glimpses of the transcendent. Whether large or small—a crocus or a panorama of galaxies, tiny bluets or a sunset over the sea—they are gifts, and like a gift, we should unwrap them...notice them...be refreshed by them.