

Melissa: Well, thank you so much for taking the time to do this. I really appreciate it.

Lacy: I'm glad. Thanks for inviting me. Thanks for inviting me.

Melissa: It's interesting too, because you actually came to mind as I have considered this idea of beauty. I can't remember your exact quote, but I do remember sitting in class. For people listening to this, you were my professor at Portland Seminary at George Fox. I can't remember, it was a class in spiritual formation or spiritual direction. I can't remember. But you said something about, how when we're talking about...maybe sometimes the discussion of God isn't accessible to all of us. But something about when we talk about beauty, that would be another way to talk about God.

Maybe you wouldn't stand behind how I'm saying that right now, but it really opened up my idea or my mind to this idea of, when we're talking about beauty, how it is a conversation about God. At least that's what I'm finding as I talk to people about authentic beauty in the world.

And so, that stuck with me, and like I said, I hope that I'm remembering at least somewhat how you said it. Again, this is years ago. Also, knowing that you're a spiritual director and have written on the spiritual life, I just was so curious to interview you about this topic of authentic beauty.

Lacy: You quote me correctly. Yeah, I think that beauty is one of the three transcendentals. They are God's fingerprints in the world.

Usually, when I talk about beauty, I quote Dallas Willard, that Dallas Willard defines beauty as goodness made manifest to the senses.

I just love that, that God has lavished goodness, beauty, and when I say truth, I mean authenticity, assured stability throughout the world, God

has flooded the world with that, with those three, and as his fingerprints of love and goodness and invitation, and they're available to everyone at any time.

Melissa: I love that. Thank you for following my very sparse remembrance of your quote too, and really making that a bit more robust.

So, you kind of picked up on one of the questions I'd like to ask is just how do you define beauty? That was a really lovely definition, but I don't know if you would add anything to that or beyond what you already stated.

Lacy: Yeah. I think the thing ... I mean, the definition again, and I'm taking it from Christian philosopher, Dallas Willard, is that beauty is goodness made manifest to the senses.

To open that up a little bit, I mean, we are sensate beings. Goodness can be so esoteric. Although we know it down in our deeper mind, kind of the core of who we are, but *beauty ignites everything in us*.

I live here on the Western Slope of the Rocky Mountains. Yeah, I know. Come visit me, Melissa.

Melissa: Gosh. Oh, okay.

Lacy: We have the view of a 14,000-foot peak and 14 are off of our back deck. And whenever people see it, you step out on the deck and it just opens up, we throw our arms back. We're so bodily. I mean, that's what beauty is, it's so bodily, that we throw our shoulders back and we open ourselves up as much as we can to take it in.

Our senses are ignited by beauty, and we have to open ourselves up, our bodily experience up. Shoulders back, eyes big. How much more can we take in? Our jaw drops in order to receive beauty. Everything in us

wants to receive it as much as we can. *Beauty is opening in every way.*

Melissa: I love the image that you give, because I think we can all kind of just, even as you described that, the cues that my body picks up of what that would be like to view that.

Lacy: You can watch this on a child, like when a child stands in front of a Christmas tree when they're young. Their jaw will drop, their shoulders expand, they bring their arms to their side. They take a deep breath in to see if they can get some smell from it as well. Just everything wants to receive this beauty.

Melissa: Okay. Is there anything else around ...? I mean, you really gave a beautiful description of these places we see beauty in the world. Is there anything else around where you see beauty in the world? I know we've talked a bit about natural landscapes, things like that, but does anything else come to mind?

Lacy: As I reflected on our conversation today, I was thinking about, actually we went and picked up my daughter from college this week. We had to empty out her dorm and our house is a ... We look like the Clampetts that's moved to Colorado. We have so much stuff on the porch and in the house. It's a wreck here. It's a total mess. And I was thinking about how incredibly beautiful it is. It's entirely sensory.

I mean, we've got feelings happening; loss, grief, joy, struggle, agency, independence, all of that is within the mess. And there is something beautiful, as well, about this connective piece that we're having together right now. Something really beautiful about it, but it is messy, and it is not orderly. We do even try to expand to take it all in.

Melissa: Okay. This kind of leads me what you shared kind of combined with your first statement around defining beauty. Something I like to ask people about too is just the experience of

brokenness. And then in the midst of a particular experience of brokenness, if you saw or see beauty breaking in.

This goes beyond the question, but it's interesting because you said that we have this openness, or we're naturally wanting to be open to beauty and it almost feels like we're seeking it. I'll just speak honestly, for myself, I know when I've experienced brokenness at times, there's almost like a, I don't know if a shutting down or like, I don't want to be as open to it because the fear of, if I open myself up, I don't want to get hurt. Something like that. I think brokenness, at least in my own life has almost like, yeah, there's not as much of that openness.

I guess that's like two questions. The first one, I guess, is just if you've been an experience of ... Or even experiences of brokenness and how you see beauty breaking in, or maybe even just, how have you contended with this, the balance between brokenness and beauty, or ... That's like five questions, but please take it wherever you'd like.

Lacy: Well, let's talk about it maybe a little bit and we can explore it maybe together because I wonder if brokenness can be an invitation to beauty.

Whereas, natural landscapes and awe-striking experiences, like for children, Christmas lights on Christmas are just kind of, they naturally flow into beauty. That's just a natural connection. *But I wonder if brokenness is the invitation, within brokenness is an invitation to beauty.*

I can tell you right now, I mean, one of the things that happens or happens certainly for me, and it seems to resonate is that when our children go off to college, we have this reconciling with our own parenting and we know that we've grown into parenting and it's so hard and we make more mistakes than we feel like we have successes.

And, so, part of the distancing is coming to be gentle and forgiving ourselves and that reconciliation with ourselves as a parent. And that can bring incredible amount of brokenness and sorrow and grief. We're helping our children get free from us, which is so hard as parents, so hard for me to help my child get free from me.

But there is an incredible beauty in this human being, moving out into her own agency in the world. And there is a brokenness in it, even as she reconciles her childhood as she moves into adulthood.

Earlier, we talked a little bit about how the Christian life is cruciformed, and it is that place where the vertical axis of the cross grounds us, and there is a sorrow in that. And the horizontal axis can represent kind of a joy and a newness budding forth. *And so many experiences of our life are the coming together of those two, right in the center of it, where our brokenness does deepen our experience of beauty.*

And so kind of for us, here she is coming back home and being forced to come back home. It is a mess. There are feelings everywhere, as much as there are boxes of things that God only knows what she brought home, but there is a beauty in it. Like we're seeing some of the growth that she moved into while she was out on her own. And we're seeing some of the ways that we've forgiven ourselves and that she's forgiven us and it's offering us freedom. And that is delicious and beautiful.

Melissa: Thank you. That was a really beautiful way to tie together all of those strands of questions I gave you. Thank you.

Lacy: Well, maybe we tried.

Melissa: On this strand or stream of brokenness, I think another thing that I think can be helpful to do is name or yeah, name some of the lies that you have experienced in your own life around beauty and if any of those come to mind.

Lacy: Yeah, I think right now, as I reflected on that question, I had a list a mile long. I mean, I have so many lies that I have believed about beauty. The one that has a lot of heat around it right now is that beauty is orderly, and that beauty is efficient. I don't know if your listeners know anything about the Enneagram, but I'm an Enneagram three, and I love efficiency. I just love the heck out of efficiency. I feel like the world is right if things are in order. That is not necessarily where beauty shows up. It does sometimes show up in efficiency and order.

But right now, the invitation to me is that beauty shows up when there's mess and mess all over. Things are not running efficiently. Clearly in the world, things are not running efficiently.

My husband is an emergency room physician. He is really up against what is not running efficiently right now.

Melissa: Oh, wow.

Lacy: Yeah. And yet there is beauty in the way that we receive the bids of connection from the other, in the way that we receive the bids of connection from our daughter, in the way that we honor her agency.

There is beauty in my husband being present to the patients who come into the emergency room right now, even as he's wearing this whole separate breathing apparatus to protect him. *There is beauty in being present to the patients as they come in, in the midst of inefficiency, in the midst of mess.*

Melissa: Wow. Yeah. So, you guys are really experiencing this in a very personal way.

Lacy: It is very real for us, yeah.

Melissa: Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. Yes, I'm going to sit with that for a little bit, that efficiency and yeah, thank you.

One of the other questions I like to ask too, is just about some of your personal experiences around things that you've experienced and that have perhaps transformed your ideas around beauty.

Lacy: Yeah. I think the efficiency certainly and the mess piece is one of them, but maybe I'll share a more personal experience.

Four years ago, I found out that I'm positive for the breast cancer gene. I'm BRCA2 positive, which means that I had to have a double mastectomy, I had to have my ovaries removed and just a number of things that I have to do to be lower my risk of breast cancer and other related cancers.

I'm a 47-year-old woman who has grown up with certain ideas about feminine beauty. I mean, this is the most personal experience I would say. And what the invitation was at the time...*I mean, certainly, my whole sense of beauty and the human body was shaken at its core.*

I mean what does feminine beauty mean when you don't have breasts or ovaries or any of those things that mark us? I think, I mean, I've been on a journey and it continues.

One of the most wonderful things that I've gotten to witness in a few chats, like online chats, lots of women who have had these, have places where they get together, is women and having tattoos across their chest.

They have incorporated their scars into beautiful pieces of art, stunning, stunning pieces of art.

So, where their pain and suffering and their sorrow...and they're really being shook to their core about what beauty means. I mean, I have seen some of the most beautiful art I've ever seen tattooed across a woman's chest where she has no breasts anymore.

I think that this understanding of beauty is actively, in four years ago, actively deconstruct. I mean, it just fell apart. And I'm watching what's being woven from that.

So, I'm finding that beauty in deep and lasting relationships. I'm finding beauty in the loyalty of friends. I'm finding beauty in the scars that I bear on my chest.

I remember one of the deepest delights, it was such a ... It was absolutely ... My husband thought I was having a mental break. It could have been. But one morning I was standing looking at the mirror at my chest. And I realized that I had the stretch marks from when I breastfed my children. Like I still have those and I was crying, but they were all happy tears, that I still had them. It felt like the most beautiful thing in the world.

Melissa: Wow.

Lacy: Yeah. So, where this reweaving of what I think about the feminine body and beauty, where this will lead me, I don't think there's an end mark, I think it's just always being rewoven, but it's certainly changed.

Melissa: Wow. Thank you so much. I love every one of your answers has so much richness to it. I feel that I have to sit and then after, as I listen back, I'll be like, oh, I have this question I would have asked as a follow up, but I'm letting it sit.

Lacy: It's the gift of being present with each other. Like we're just here in the moment together.

Melissa: Yeah. Thank you. Yes. The last thing I like to ask people in terms of the structured questions that I've been so curious about is just, if there was one thing that you wish people knew about beauty, what would that be?

Lacy: *I would like people to know that beauty is right before you, in the midst of the mess of life and feelings and maybe failing bodies or strained relationships, even parenting failures. In the midst of helping our children get free from us, in the midst of diagnosis of disease, in the midst of the joys and the regular mundane of taking care of people in your house or being cared for. Beauty is just, it's right there. It's right before you. And to listen for those invitations to open yourself up to it.*

Melissa: Thank you. Something I like to ask people too, is ... Yeah, another ... Just based on what you just said, have you found things to be helpful for keeping that openness to beauty?

Lacy: That's such a good question. Let me think, I want to think to be thoughtful about it. What particular practices have been helpful? Well, I would say as an Enneagram three is to notice when I'm pretending.

Beauty is, we all know, a fake. We can smell it 50 paces. So, I have to notice, is this actually what I'm feeling? Is this actually what I'm thinking? I think noticing whenever I sort of move into either what I've been taught, or it just doesn't have that ring of authenticity to it anymore. So, I'm trying to listen. That can happen when I use absolutes. Language like, "always," "never," or whatever. I know I'm trying to convince myself or someone else of something. That kind of reminds me to dial in.

Another is to be fully present to the person or the experience in front of me. I like the acronym BOW, B-O-W, and that is "body." So, I want to notice if I've turned my body away from the person or the thing that I'm looking at. I mean, we can't really fully even...I love nature, so we can't fully breathe in...It just snowed here yesterday. The beauty of freshly fallen snow without my body being in the midst of it and open to it.

That doesn't mean naked; that doesn't mean walking outside without any clothes on. It just means opening myself up to it and to being fully bodily present.

And that's true with people too, you know, with screens in our hands, we're not bodily present.

Even our posture can be closed off. I know when I'm having some vigorous fellowship with my teenage daughters, if my arms are crossed, I'm not open to them and they know it too. And they we're both, we're all going to start running our pretending lines.

The other is “O” for “openness”. Just, am I open without judgment? Even to a painting, am I open without judgment to what that painting might be teaching me? Right now, little crocuses are pushing their way up through the soil. *Am I open to the glory of God that this crocus could want to teach me about?*

And the “W” is “wonder” and just allowing my own curiosity to be stirred.

I think a wonderful attribute of beauty has to do with curiosity.

I wonder... this sense of ... I wonder what this person is thinking. I wonder how they are experiencing this moment. Or again, when I'm outside, I wonder what the trees have to teach me. And we have horses, I wonder a lot with my horses. I wonder what something so huge, so massive with such the ability to harm me, I wonder where their gentleness comes from.

So BOW really helps me to have a way to step towards and be open to beauty.

Melissa: Thank you so much. Because I think it seems the more I talk to people, just that openness seems so pivotal. And, so, I think

having some tangible things like an acronym, yeah, because they're all very, very helpful.

I was thinking, as I was contemplating our conversation today, I realized I was going to introduce you as a spiritual director. It's interesting, just the language I think is very familiar in some circles, not as familiar in others. And so, would you mind maybe just saying a little bit about to you what the work of a spiritual director, what that means to you. I think it's such a beautiful practice and companioning and I would love it if people could maybe hear a little bit what that terminology, how you would describe it.

Lacy: Spiritual director, and every director has their own understanding. Can I just let you know about that? There are all kinds of ways that people understand spiritual direction.

But for me, spiritual direction is accompanying another in their life with the divine. So, I don't lead. It is a ministry at the elbow I come alongside, and we meet once a month or once every six weeks. Most of my directees are online. I have a few that I meet in person, but I live in a small town and I want people to have as much freedom as possible, so it's good if we don't run in the same circles. And I accompany. So, I'll ask some questions and lead us in some moments of silence and reflection.

And we recognize this flow of goodness and beauty and truth. I recognize the flow of the divine and I help another listen to what is stirring within them, and then I invite them to respond to what they hear.

And that response can be prayer, that response can be gratitude, that response sometimes can be anger, and just holding the greatest openness, the “O” and wonder the “W” with the person that I am accompanying.

Melissa: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Lacy: I practice with children too at Haven House, which is a transitional facility for homeless families. And they're all secluded and not allowed to leave and no one's allowed in right now because the COVID-19.

Melissa: Oh, wow.

Lacy: Yeah. So, I'm sending little videos actually, and you can get access to those YouTube, little videos to the children.

Melissa: And that was a piece of your work that I did want to highlight too. I think because for me personally, I hadn't thought about spiritual direction as ... I mean, obviously you can do it with children, but I just ... In the training that I did, I always just had this template of thinking about with adults.

And, sos I love that your work is ... Or a piece of your work, a portion of your work is with children. I was reading about the book that you just put out as well, *Spiritual Conversations with Children*. I think that's correct? I just thought it was such a beautiful, again, another tangible tool, your book, to know how to maybe have those conversations with children and then how that can expand to our spiritual conversations with one another as well, any age.

I don't know if you have any thoughts or words that you wanted to say around just your book and your work with children. I just think that's such a beautiful and perhaps an unattended to portion of our population, at least. I mean, I don't know. I don't know if there are studies on that, but at least in my own mind, I'm like, yes, that's such a beautiful thing to do.

Lacy: Yeah, you're right, it's not done. I teach a class on it on *Spiritual Conversations with Children and Spiritual Direction* through the

Companioning Center and those start in the fall. But you're right, it's not been done. My doctoral work was on that, but not a thing necessarily.

And lots of people have talked about how to have spiritual conversations with children, but there hasn't been a book on it. And yeah, my book is super practical. It's for parents and grandparents and pastors and just regular folk about how to have a spiritual conversation with children.

The thing is, is that two sort of themes that run through this piece is that children are having spiritual conversations. They're having these interactions with God all the time. It's just, no one has paid attention. So, it's happening. So how do we help them recognize that this is what they're having and invite them to respond to it?

The second is that, and this comes from the theologian, a Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner, that all of us still have very much alive in us our childhood selves. We didn't switch from childhood self to adolescent self, to young adult self, to adult self, to older adult. Those are all arbitrary markers. That, instead, we bring with us into our life right now, we have our childhood self and our teenage self and what we believed about God with us right now.

One of the threads that is woven into this book is how to care for your childhood self, how to reconcile childhood wounds and how to acknowledge what you believed about God when you were a child and how that's grown and changed over time and the invitations of connection and healing that are woven within our lives right now.

Melissa: So it's really a book for all of us basically?

Lacy: Yeah, really. Yeah, we're all children. Thanks be to God.

Melissa: I'm excited about it as well. I mean, now I'm more excited to hear you describe it further. I'm a therapist, and so I really enjoy talking to kids about their emotions and things like that because I

feel like they're experiencing these things, but people just don't talk to them about it. So, I'm really excited to have, again, a tool to just kind of help me think further about, okay, then how do we talk to kids about spirituality and their experiences with God? Yeah. So, I think it's ... I am excited for your book. And it's out in the world now, so people can access it, which is ...

Lacy: Yeah. Thank you. I hope it's helpful. I hope it is. That's my longing it is that it will be helpful, that it will open up places for people to jump off on. I mean, it's not the end all of all these conversations, I hope it's the start of hundreds and thousands of more work around this.

Melissa: Yes. So, I'm excited for that. Thank you. Well, it's so good to see you. I've been able to follow you on Instagram. If people want to follow you, you're on Instagram. What is your ...

Lacy: I think I'm Lacy Finn Borgo, something like that.

Melissa: Okay.

Lacy: And then on Facebook, of course.

Melissa: Okay.

Lacy: Which my daughters tell me, oh, mom, Facebook is so, so over. I was like, well, I'm old woman.

Melissa: I don't know. It's hard to keep up with ... I don't even know what's ... I know Instagram is in, but maybe not. Maybe that's like old news too. Who knows?

Lacy: Yeah.

Melissa: Well, thank you so much for taking this time. Also, just in the midst of all that we're going through and with your husband

working in the healthcare field, I really appreciate that you took time to do this.

Lacy: It's so good to be with you, Melissa.

Melissa: Thank you. And I just have to name, I was watching the news conference before this. And so just the tone, you have a very ... Just, I can even sense your peace and your ability to be with someone over the technology that we're doing this over Skype, but such a shift. So, I really value this peaceful space that this interview has offered today. So, thank you.

Lacy: Yeah, you're welcome. I really do hope that. And when people do listen to it, that they will just take a deep breath and allow themselves to rest for a few minutes, really in the peaceful presence of God.

Melissa: Thank you.

Lacy: You're welcome. Good to be with you. Gosh, blessings on your podcast. This sounds amazing.

Melissa: Oh, thank you. Thank you. Yeah, it just kind of keeps ... We'll see where it leads. I value every conversation I have and learn so much. So, this has been such a gift and a dynamic process. Like, I don't know where it'll lead, but this has been a really amazing and unexpected journey. So, thank you for being a part of it.