Beauty, Truth, Life, and Love

Four Essentials for the Abundant Life

J. Brent Bill
Love is the fruit of beauty. When you see a beautiful tree, you fall in love—ah, beautiful flowers, the bluebells, the primroses! Beauty enters the heart and creates love. That is why in the world today we lack love, because there is less and less beauty in our everyday lives.

—Satish Kumar

Beauty, truth, life, and love are centered on the very essence of the life God desires for us to live. I said that in the opening chapter. I say it again here because I think it’s crucial for us to remember that if we really want to live the abundant life. When we seek beauty, truth, life, and love in all we are and do, then we do more than just exist; we grow and blossom into the people we were created to be. Then we find ourselves limned with a luminosity that comes from deep within us that lights our path and guides our way as we move through this world. The abundant life becomes more than just a concept. It becomes our reality.

Now before you think I’m painting too rosy a picture of the impact of beauty, truth, life, and love in our lives, let me assure you that I’m well aware that life is hard at times. The abundant life is not all joy and kitty pictures. Not every moment sparkles the way we’d like it to. Not this side of eternity, that is.
When I think of that, I think of Brother Lawrence doing dishes and repairing sandals in the priory of the Discalced Carmelites in Paris. Kitchen work and fixing stinking sandals hardly sounds like an abundant life. And yet, Brother Lawrence made it so because he practiced those things to the glory of God.

He found that the most effective way of living his life in and with God was by doing daily work out of love. He wisely believed—and that wisdom was passed on to us in the little book *The Practice of the Presence of God*—that every activity can unite us with God. Not just the sacred times. Not just the glorious times. But all times.

When I read *The Practice of the Presence of God*, as I have many times since high school, I find a man who had endured hardships and yet found an abundant life of beauty, truth, life, and love. Born to peasant parents, he became a soldier as a way to have regular meals and make a small amount of money. But it was the time of the Thirty Years’ War. He fought against the Swedes, French, and Germans. He suffered greatly, and then he joined the Carmelites, deciding to sanctify his daily life and work by living a life of love of God.

“Ah, yes,” you may say, “but he was a saint. One of those rare ones who can look beyond this veil of flesh into the world of spirit.” Indeed, he was a saint. But not because he possessed something we do not. Rather because he chose to look for God in the holy ordinary of his life. The dishes. The sandals. The service to others. In them he found beauty. Truth. Life. Love.

Perhaps seventeenth-century France seems like a simpler time compared to ours. And he was safely ensconced in a monastery, while we are not. We are in the real modern world fraught with peril and business and busyness. Maybe that made it easier for Lawrence to practice these ideals.

Well, I doubt, could Lawrence visit us today, that he would find our times any more fraught than his own. Wars. Sickness. Famine. Certainly doing dishes and repairing sandals is no less drudgery than
working in a cubicle or on an assembly line or in a fast-food restaurant. What made the difference between his finding an abundant life and our own lack of the same was that he learned early on to seek the four ideals in all he did. In his seeking, he found them. And the abundant life opened for him.

In my own life, even as I try to keep the ideals of beauty, truth, life, and love present at all times, doing so can become difficult. I experience periods of grief when I lose those dear to me. There are times when my chores feel like a grind. I get frustrated with the politics of hate and meanness that seem to surround me. I'm also a person who has struggled with depression a good bit of my adult life. Being hounded by the black dog, I call it.

At times such as those, it is hard to see my life as abundant. Especially if I think of the abundant life as perfect and easy. But such times have taught me that they come not because I lack faith. They have nothing to do with who I am as a spiritual person. Nothing to do, that is, in the sense that I experience them as a result of some sort of spiritual failing. As things that would go away if I only believed more. Behaved better. Read my Bible more intensely. Prayed with more passion. No. They are just part of my living in this life in this world in this time.

When I look, though, for beauty, truth, life, and love even in the midst of hard times, I can catch glimpses of their presence. When I'm grieving, for example, I remember with love the dear one who has passed and all the beauty and truth and life that flowed through them into me.

In other trying times, I often find those four ideals shining through the lives of my friends who come for a visit or who call or write at just the time I needed it.

I also cling to the words of Saint Paul when he says, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.” I read that as meaning God fits all of our lives into a pattern that turns out for good. Perhaps some of the threads composing the pattern for the
tapestry of our lives are short. Others are long. Some may even be broken. Certainly, Tristan Bernard, the French playwright, poet, and novelist, could well have thought a major thread of his and his wife’s life tapestry was broken when they were arrested by the Gestapo during World War II. At that moment, before being imprisoned, however, he told his wife, “The time of fear is over. The time of hope has begun.” The thread of fear was broken. The thread of hope began to be weaved into their tapestry.

Our time of fear, of living in lack and unhappiness, and moving toward hope and abundance, happens when we make beauty, truth, life, and love more than just some of the threads in the tapestry of our lives. We need to make them the warps.

A tapestry, you see, comprises two main components: the warp and the weft.

The weft threads are the ones we see when we look at a tapestry. They are the colored pieces that run horizontally and combine to form the completed picture a tapestry presents to the viewer. They can be long. They can be short. These threads don’t run through the entire tapestry. That’s why they’re technically known as “discontinuous wefts.” Each thread is knotted or tucked into place and then another is added. This process continues until the picture is formed.

However, each of these thousands of threads need something to anchor them. Those are the warp. The warp runs vertically. Warp thread is also heavier than weft threads, which is why they make good anchors for the tapestry.

If we use beauty, truth, life, and love as our warp threads, then everything that comes into our life—big or small, easy or difficult, happy or sad—is used as a weft to weave the amazing tapestry of our abundant life with God.

Another thing that is important about a tapestry is that, historically, when making a tapestry the weavers worked from the back, not the front. While they worked with a design, called a cartoon, many did
so while looking at its reflection in a mirror as the cartoon hung on
the wall. The weavers did not see the completed image until the last
weft was tucked into the warp and the tapestry was turned over to be
viewed as a whole.

So it is with our lives. Again, to quote Saint Paul, “For now we see
only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I
know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” While
Paul was a tentmaker by trade, he may have known about tapestry
construction. Some fragments of Grecian tapestries have been found
that date to the third century BCE.

We weave the tapestry of our lives never seeing the entire finished
product in our time here on earth. At best, we work from a cartoon
looking in a mirror. Seeing a reflection. We set the warp of beauty,
truth, life, and love. We weave the weft in part. The design we’re work-
ing from will produce, with divine assistance, a beautiful picture of a
life well-lived.

Full.
Rich.
Pleasing.
Abundant.