

## dedication

To Mom and Dad -

For introducing me to the Living Word,

For teaching me Who to turn to for strength,

For believing in me.

Your passion for Him inspires me every day.

I love you.

## WANT MORE? LIFE

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brio devotional series

want **more?**  
**life**

by natalie lloyd



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# I'm Not Pretty ~ I'm Beauti- ful!



A smile  
brightened  
her cute face  
as she told  
me about her  
day. "Guess  
what? We ate  
cow stomach!"

**P**retty—the word often used to describe a princess in fairy tales; an actress on a magazine cover; the girl who makes guys gush as she passes them in the hall. When I was a hefty middle-schooler, the thing I dreaded hearing most was, "Natalie has such a pretty *face*" (meaning the rest of me wasn't). Even though I dropped the weight, got contacts to replace hot pink frames, and watched my teeth straighten out, I always heard the "p-word" associated with something I wasn't: "She's so tall and *pretty*." (At 4'11", that wasn't music to my ears.) "Her hair is so long/short/curly/straight/dark/light . . . and *pretty*." (Whatever mine wasn't.) "She is sooooo skinny and . . . *pretty*." (Was I ugly because I wasn't skinny?)

Like so many other teens, I constantly sought the approval of others. I thought if I could only be like them, I would be pretty. I knew Christ thought I was beautiful, but I decided I didn't share His idea of beauty. I remember times when I learned what He meant by the word *beautiful*.

On a Thanksgiving break

from college, I went with my former youth group to visit a shut-in. They worked for a long time making food that was . . . well, edible, and I watched their smiling faces as they spoke louder for an old man to hear. My friend Catie belted out a song. Chase played a tune on his harmonica. Mr. Blevins shared his inspiring life of faith. So . . . *beautiful*.

I was brushing my teeth after my missions team had gotten back to the hotel from a day in Rio. The door opened and Katherine popped in. A smile brightened her cute face as she told me about her day. "Guess what? We ate cow stomach!" My first instinct? "Ewwww!!!"

"Oh, I loved it," she said, still aglow.

"You wubbed it?" I asked, trying to talk with a toothbrush in my mouth.

"Well, maybe the food wasn't great, but it made me feel like a real missionary." *Beautiful*.

On another day in Rio, my team told me about their trip to the dump. They saw vultures fight children for food, watched people skinning rats to eat, and

smelled the atrocious odor. But Laura's report was different. "I loved it," she said. She had sat on a pile of garbage and held a little kid who worked there. She smiled and shared how this gave her new insight to God. "It reminded me of God's love, because He was willing to come to me in all my garbage and sin—because He loved me—to just hold me." **Beautiful.**

Ever stop to think about God's definition of beautiful? Selfless love, endless hope, solid faith, a servant's heart. If I stopped to think of all the garbage I convey in my actions and words, it would be a little scary. Am I *for real*? If I'm in love with God, people need to see it in more than just attendance at church. They need to see more than a bracelet that says, "What Would Jesus Do?" They need to see a life reflecting what Jesus *continues to do daily* in my life. They need to see someone who can't

pretty

tall

skinny

ugly

heart

pretty

tall

skinny

ugly

heart

wait to talk to God, who is hungry for His Word, willing to reach out to others.

### **Beautiful.**

We may all feel imperfect at times, but the next time you are comparing the way you look to someone else, or glaring at your braces, walk away from that mirror. Stop the compulsive exercising to lose weight. Shut the magazines that say you are pretty only if you look the right way. Tune out guys who drool when they see movie stars. Just shut your eyes and listen. More precious than any fairy tale is this truth: Your Prince has spoken.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart" (Jeremiah 1:5). You are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). He is so in love with you!

You are not just *pretty*, you are **Beautiful!**

**D**ear God, take my heart and make it  
Your own. Help me to stop concentrat-  
ing so much on what others think.  
Instead, help me to base my life and values on  
what You think. I want to know You, Lord!

a special prayer

journal



questions: Read 1 Samuel 16:7.

What does God see when He looks at us?

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What should this make us want to do?

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Would God see a beautiful person when He looks at you?

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If not, how can you become beautiful in His eyes?

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Using God's criteria for beauty, name some beautiful people you know.

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dig deeper

Think of someone you met who you thought was really pretty, but later wondered why you ever thought that. Or think of someone you thought was unattractive, but later thought of how beautiful they were. What changed your opinion?

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***Psalm 45:11*** tells us, "The king is enthralled by your beauty." No matter what we may look like now or in the future, we will never lose our beauty in His eyes! Ask God to cleanse your heart and make you totally beautiful. Then ask Him to show you ways to "let your beauty show." Have no fear; He loves you!

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# It Couldn't Get Any Worse

My alarm went off 20 minutes late. I literally screamed. I had a big test, and I'd missed it. I got up to

find a brand-new zit big enough to have its own zip code on my face. I ripped a contact while putting it in. My mom called to tell me that my cat died.

After my classes, I sat in my dorm room and cried. Every part of that day had been horrible.

What would I tell my professor? "I'm sorry, but I'm too stupid to set an alarm clock." And only little kids cried when their pets died, right? But I was devastated! My eyes were so red from crying, I looked like a lab rat! However, I assumed that if God didn't care enough to deflect my problems a little bit, He certainly didn't want to hear about them.

I was very wrong.

It's easy to trust God when everything is going good, yet too often I find I don't. If everything is going okay, then I neglect my time with God. It's sad

that the only time I have a "pour out my heart" conversation with Him is when I have a bad day—when I get so frustrated I think I'm going to explode—when I sleep late—when my pet dies.

When I sat down and actually made a list of the times in my life I'd felt closest to God, I noticed something. The times I was the saddest, loneliest, and most hurt were when I was my strongest spiritually. Let me give you some examples.

When my grandmother died, I decided up front to seek out God and let Him be my comfort. He was! It felt so good to cry when I prayed. I was really honest with Him. When I think back about that time, it's still sad, but I also have this wonderful picture of God's love that makes me smile.

I was going to a college where I didn't know anyone. I was angry during orientation weekend. The dorm room was cold and quiet. I was lonely and miserable. No phone. No friends. I opened my Bible and read and prayed. God led me to the book of Jeremiah, chapter



I found the tear-stained pages again . . . and remembered God's faithfulness.

18—you know, where it says all that stuff about the potter. Months later, after another fun night of laughs with the new friends I loved like sisters, I found the tear-stained pages again . . . and remembered God's faithfulness.

I could go on and on, but I think you get the picture. Do we have to go through tough times to get closer to God? No. But, it's a proven fact: You *will* go through hard times. You *will* have bad days. Some will be minor, trip-over-nothing, spill-a-Coke-on-your-shirt, become-an-idiot-in-front-of-a-group days. But other days will be emotionally draining. Even when we can't see it, through our weakest moments God is still close.

That night in my prayers I caught myself off guard when through tears, I said, "Thanks for a good day." I smiled. I've learned I can find good things in

alarm

zit

died

cried

trust

alarm

zit

died

cried

trust

*every* day. Some contain bad experiences, but every day is a gift.

The next morning I walked into my professor's office, knowing my lamebrain excuse would give him a good laugh to start the day. After some casual talk, I finally managed, "Dr. Shurden-my-alarm-didn't-go-off-and-I-know-you-think-I'm-irresponsible-but-I-wanted-to-come-apologize," all in one breath.

To my surprise, he smiled. "We all have days like that, Natalie." (*What?*) "I'm glad you came and talked to me about it. How about taking your quiz tomorrow?" My eyes brightened. I thanked him a thousand times and got up to leave, "Oh, Natalie?" *Uh-oh.* I turned. "Get the alarm clock fixed, okay?" Dr. Shurden said with a grin as he went back to his paperwork.

row?" My eyes brightened. I thanked him a thousand times and got up to leave, "Oh, Natalie?" *Uh-oh.* I turned. "Get the alarm clock fixed, okay?" Dr. Shurden said with a grin as he went back to his paperwork.

**O**h, God, often I feel so overwhelmed! It seems that life is one trial after another, and I just keep failing! Help me to get

through these times, Father, and remind me that You are always there, no matter what. I'm desperate for You. Just hold me close!

a special prayer

journal



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When things are spinning out of control, His Word can always bring our lives back together. What does **Jeremiah 18:1-6** tell you God can do with your life?

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Read **Isaiah 43:1b-3a**. What do these verses say about being overwhelmed?

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What do they say about hard times?

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dig deeper



# For Such a Time as This



It doesn't take  
long to see  
emptiness in  
people.

Few of God's called have ever felt worthy. Even if we could glimpse the big picture, the ultimate plan He has for our lives, I have a feeling we would be blown away at the dreams He dreams for us. Our Creator sees divine potential, and His plans transcend time as we know it. His voice has thundered softly into the hearts of thousands—among them: shepherds on a dusty hillside, prostitutes longing for gracious mercy, and three young men whose eyes mirrored an encompassing fire they knew could eat them whole. These are just a few examples of people who suddenly found themselves right in the middle of God's intricate, perfect plan.

God asked a murderer to lead thousands out of captivity, an unlikely Jewish girl to challenge the throne in the midst of persecution, and a young woman, whose

very name meant "bitter," to carry the Son of God into humanity. In desperate times (and from what I've heard, times have always been desperate), God has called His children into the game. Like nervous Little Leaguers we anticipate the idea, but tremble in the moment.

When He lays a big dream, a huge plan, on my heart, I want to scream, "God, I can't do this! Don't you realize who I am?" I have a feeling God smiles. Oh, He realizes who I am, but am I really aware of who God is?

Like many before us, you and I are full of imperfections, but we do not have to impress God to serve Him. God won't suddenly change His mind and decide to pick me if I write an award-winning novel, or become the most popular girl in my class, or lead a hundred people in a Bible study. He is more concerned

with my availability. He has chosen to use me just as I am.

God's will isn't something that is going to happen to us eventually—it is happening *right now*. He looks for hearts that are earnestly seeking after Him in this moment. He sees our availability and uses it. The way our little finite human minds work, we see serving Him as something that can only happen when we become more articulate, feel more comfortable around big groups, or hear a call into a specific ministry. Yet there are thousands of empty, lonely people who need us right now. There are always chances to spend time with people who feel as if they're watching the world from a high-rise window. If we pay attention, it doesn't take long to see emptiness in peo-

worthy

dreams

divine

voice

favor

worthy

dreams

divine

voice

favor

ple. Inevitably, God opens doors which allow us to be His hands and feet to those people. One of my favorite passages is found in Isaiah 61:1-2.

*"The LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor . . ."*

He has sent us to do a big job, one He's had in mind before the beginning of time.

When a God-sized dream falls on your heart, don't write it off as someone else's task; something too big for you. It *is* too big for you but never too big for Him. We are exactly where we are for a really unique reason: We were created for such a time as this.







dig deeper

In Scripture, we often find the people God used were not your typical “heroes.” Yet they all seemed to have one thing in common—a dedicated love for God that they would not compromise. Read **Esther 4:13-14**. What was Esther willing to give up in order to do what was right?

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A common thread in Scripture for achieving God’s purposes is obedience. Is there an area in your life right now in which you are not being obedient to Christ?

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What does **Psalms 51:16-17** say God desires from us?

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