Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord

A Retreat Planning Guide

Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us.

Psalm 90:17 KJV
The mission of CTA is to glorify God by providing purposeful products that lift up and encourage the body of Christ—because we love him!

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A Retreat Planning Guide
Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us. Psalm 90:17 KJV

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Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

If this retreat planner proves to be helpful to you, we would like to hear from you. Your words will encourage us! If you have suggestions for us to consider as we create ministry helps like this in the future, please send those, too. Send e-mail to editor@CTAinc.com. Please include the subject line: RBL2DR. Or write to Editorial Coordinator, Dept. RBL2DR. P.O. Box 1205, Fenton, MO 63026-1205.
Contents

Notes and Helps for the Retreat Leader

Getting Started ........................................................................................................... 4
Planning for Small-Group Sessions ............................................................................. 6
Session 1: The Beauty of the Lord ............................................................................. 8
Session 2: A Beautiful Wardrobe ............................................................................. 9
Evening Devotion ...................................................................................................... 9
Time for Friends and Fun (Mixer, Games, Crafts, or Projects) ........................... 10
Breakfast .................................................................................................................. 11
Session 3: Beauty Tips .............................................................................................. 11
Food and Friendship ................................................................................................. 11
Reflection and Prayer ............................................................................................... 12
Lunch ......................................................................................................................... 12
Session 4: Beauty Marks ............................................................................................ 13
Session 5: Beauty Reflected ..................................................................................... 13
Break ........................................................................................................................ 14
Closing Devotion ....................................................................................................... 14

Participant Handouts

Suggested Schedule .................................................................................................... 15
Session 1: The Beauty of the Lord ............................................................................. 16
Session 2: A Beautiful Wardrobe ............................................................................. 18
Session 3: Beauty Tips .............................................................................................. 21
Reflection and Prayer ............................................................................................... 23
Session 4: Beauty Marks ............................................................................................ 24
Session 5: Beauty Reflected ..................................................................................... 26
Notes for Next Time ................................................................................................. 28
Letterhead Template ................................................................................................. 29
Getting Started

This guide will help you plan a simple, two-day retreat for women’s groups in your congregation or Christian organization. While intended for groups of 5 to 35 participants, the material can be adapted for larger or smaller groups. These materials assume a schedule of Friday evening through Saturday afternoon (see page 15). By adjusting the schedule a bit, you may shorten or lengthen the retreat to meet the needs of your group.

To shorten it, complete only as many sections as is feasible at the retreat site. Then use the rest of the materials on consecutive Sunday mornings or during a mid-week women’s Bible study.

To lengthen it, consider spending more time on each of the input modules. Or add more activities (for example, additional times of group worship, extra crafts, more elaborate projects, additional recreation time, or a prayer labyrinth activity).

Details, Details

If you and your group are new to retreat planning, many helpful guidebooks will walk you step-by-step through the details. Visit your local Christian bookstore or log on to your favorite online bookseller and type “Christian retreat planning” into the search engine.

On the other hand, if you have participated in a few retreats or have planned them previously, you will probably be able to think through most aspects of the retreat planning process on your own.

In either case, you’ll likely want to ask individuals or small teams to arrange for . . .

• **Prayer** for leaders and participants before, during, and after the retreat.

• **Accommodations** at a nearby retreat center, hotel, bed and breakfast, lakeside condominium, or some other inviting location. If possible, avoid meeting in your church building. Usually, one point of a retreat is to get away for a fresh perspective; that implies that a setting as familiar as your own church fellowship hall likely will not serve you and your guests very well.

• **Transportation** or carpooling to the location, if appropriate.

• **Hospitality**, including creating welcome packets, arranging chairs and tables in the meeting room (unless the facility you use provides this), distributing
The hospitality committee should order one copy of the devotion book *Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord* for each participant. It’s available in both KJV and NIV (see your CTA catalog or the CTA website at www.CTAinc.com for details). **Everyone who attends will need a copy of the devotion book.** The content is integral to the program and discussion.
Everyone will also need a *Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord* bookmark and pen. All these will provide a keepsake reminder of the retreat for many years to come.

In addition, the hospitality committee should create a package of inexpensive, themed gifts for each person attending. A gracious benefactor might want to pick up the cost. Otherwise, build the cost into the retreat fee. CTA offers a number of *Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord*-themed products appropriate for this purpose, including:

- **Mini spa Set**: includes body lotion, a pumice stone, and a bilingual, 8-panel devotional booklet.
- **Manicure Set**: includes an emery board, nail clippers, and tweezers, packaged in a carrying case, complete with a gift bow.
- **Two-tone tote bag**.

These items can be purchased at an amazing price! If you have a limited budget, consider putting together several items to create two or three gift sets and award them as door prizes. You could draw names, tape a note under “winning chairs” or a “winning lunch tray,” or award prizes to several people—for example, the person who traveled the farthest to attend, the person who has longest to wait until her next birthday, and the person who packed the smallest (or largest) suitcase.

Or simply arrange a variety of themed gifts on each table—perhaps in a pretty basket—and invite participants to choose one or two items they would especially like to have.

**Planning for Small-Group Sessions**

The materials suggest five different ways to select small-group discussion leaders, a new suggestion for each session. This approach will provide opportunity for shared leadership—and perhaps provoke some
giggles and fun along the way. However, you may find it more effective to divide the participants into groups ahead of time, choosing from among each, one person who has some leadership skills and the faith and understanding that will be helpful in leading the discussions.

Starting on page 16, you’ll find a discussion guide for each of the sessions. You will need to duplicate copies for each participant. Although copies are designed in full color, they’ll still look attractive if copied in black and white. To participate in the suggested discussions, each participant will also need a copy of the devotion book Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord.

Unless you have pre-assigned small groups, participants will need to form them in Session 1 (3–5 participants per group). Form these randomly, let participants form their own groups, or assign participants to groups based on pre-existing friendships. In any case, make sure that guests who have come by themselves and those who need help meeting others during the group-forming process are welcomed into an appropriate group.

As each session begins, someone in leadership should distribute the discussion guides for that session, help form the small groups as necessary, and call attention to the “time budget” for completing the activities as suggested in each discussion guide. Each small group will need a discussion leader to guide her group through the questions and keep track of the time. Other group members carry responsibility for listening carefully to one another’s comments and adding thoughtful, helpful responses themselves. Be sure to point out that the discussion leader is not the “teacher.” Everyone needs to work together to make each session spiritually worthwhile and personally meaningful.

When time has expired, a retreat leader should call for the whole group’s attention; ask for insights, comments, or questions; and respond appropriately. If you have a leader whose insights and biblical knowledge participants will respect, and if that person feels comfortable fielding questions and making comments without prior preparation, consider letting her preside over all the small-group debriefing sessions during the retreat.

If not, simply frame each debriefing time as a time to share insights. Remember, the main purpose of this retreat is to deepen relationships, to provide a respite from the busyness of life, and to encourage participants in their faith relationship with Jesus. Reserve in-depth Bible study for other settings in your church.
Session 1: The Beauty of the Lord
Small-group discussion (45–60 minutes)

Key Scripture Verse: Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us. Psalm 90:17 KJV

Each person needs . . .

- A copy of the discussion page (pp. 16–17)
- A Bible
- A copy of Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord devotion book
- A Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord pen and bookmark set

If you have pre-assigned small groups, announce them and ask participants to join others in their group now. Or give participants freedom to form their own groups of 3–5 women in each.

As you begin this session, distribute the devotion books and Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord pen and bookmark sets. Participants will use the pens to jot down answers and thoughts during their discussion. They can use the bookmarks to mark Bible passages they find especially helpful or comforting during the conversation. (See your CTA catalog or the CTA Web site at www.CTAinc.com for details about ordering.)

If you have enlisted small-group discussion leaders ahead of time, introduce them now. If not, ask each small group to choose a leader, based on the criterion listed on the discussion page. Explain that this person is not the teacher. Instead, she is responsible for keeping track of time, making sure everyone has a chance to participate, and keeping everyone focused on the questions in the discussion guide. Each session, a different person will serve as leader.

When about five minutes of the session remain, a retreat planner should note this for the whole group. When time has fully expired, call for everyone’s attention; ask for insights, comments, or questions; and respond appropriately.
Session 2: A Beautiful Wardrobe
Small-group discussion (45–60 minutes)

Key Scripture Verse: Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. . . . And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:12,14

Each person needs . . .
• A copy of the discussion pages (pp. 18–20)
• A Bible
• A copy of Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord devotion book
• Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord pen and bookmark set

Have participants sit close to the others in their small group as they did for Session 1. Tell the small group leaders they may begin the discussion, based on the handout for Session 2 when the members of their group are ready. If you did not pre-assign leaders, tell the groups to choose a leader, based on the criterion listed on the discussion page. Remind everyone that this person is not the teacher. During each session of the retreat, a different person will serve as leader to keep the conversation flowing and track the time.

When about five minutes of the session remain, a retreat planner should note this for the whole group. When time has fully expired, call for everyone's attention; ask for insights, comments, or questions; and respond appropriately.

Evening Devotion
Large-group session (15 minutes)

Reconfigure chairs, if necessary, for the worship time. Before you begin the devotion, you may want to distribute mementos of the retreat or draw for door prizes.

If possible, find a way to include praise music, hymns, or other music your group will find meaningful during devotional times during your retreat. Group singing, especially, will add much to this time of worship. Ideally, a praise team, guitarist, or pianist will provide accompaniment.
However, many groups will do just fine with a CD or MP3 player. Having the songs you plan to use cued up ahead of time and making sure everyone has access to the words you will sing are both key to the mood you want to set.

Use the free Ministry Message “Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord” found at www.CTAinc.com/FREE.

Time for Friends and Fun

After the devotion, introduce the idea that the Scriptures endorse fun and relationships with other believers as important for the overall well-being of God’s people. Read Proverbs 17:22 and invite everyone to spend the rest of the evening relaxing. Then call the Entertainment Committee forward, turn them loose, and let the frivolous fun begin!

You may choose to use the rest of the evening in any of several ways. For instance, depending on the facilities available to you, the setting of your retreat, the time of year, the weather outside, and group members’ interests and abilities, you may wish to offer options like these:

- Shoulder massages
- Skits or a talent show
- A foot massage or manicure party (give each participant one of the Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord mini spa sets and/or manicure sets as part of this activity.)
- Aerobics, volleyball, basketball, softball
- Board games
- A seminar led by a dietician, nurse, or other expert focused on “Healthy Eating for Stress-Free Living” or another pertinent topic
- Scrapbooking
- Skits or a talent show
- A CD or DVD that will guide the group in relaxing (type “Christian relaxation” into your Internet Web browser’s search engine.)
- Knitting lessons or a knitting project
- An evening nature hike
- Chocolate recipe exchange
- Mission presentation or project
- Quilting lessons or a quilting project
- Healthful recipes exchange
Breakfast

If all or most participants arrive for breakfast at the same time, the leader may want to ask the group to join in prayer, thanking God for the meal. An impromptu prayer of thanks would be appropriate.

Remind participants to bring a Bible, their copy of Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord, and the matching pens and bookmarks you distributed last evening to today’s sessions.

Session 3: Beauty Tips
Small-group discussion (45–60 minutes)

Key Scripture Verse: One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. Psalm 27:4

Each person needs . . .
• A copy of the discussion page (pp. 21–22)
• Bible
• Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord devotion book, pen, and bookmark

When about five minutes of the session remain, a retreat planner should note this for the whole group. When time has fully expired, call for everyone’s attention; ask for insights, comments, or questions; and respond appropriately.

Food and Friendship

Set aside 30 minutes or so for snacks and informal relationship-building. Encourage participants to explore the facility in which you are meeting. They may visit the bookstore or library, if one is available, take a walk with a friend, or simply sit and chat. Linger longer, if time is available.
Reflection and Prayer

Individual activity (60 minutes)

Each person needs . . .
• A copy of the participant handout from p. 23 of this guide
• Extra paper to jot down ideas, journal, write letters, and/or make prayer lists (consider using the letterhead template offered on p. 29)

After the mid-morning snack has been cleared away, distribute the participant handout from page 23 in this guide and explain the individual activity, following these main points:

• The next 60 minutes belong to each participant individually and to Jesus.
• Participants should use their time in any way they believe will draw them closer to Christ.
• The ideas on the sheet they have received are only suggestions; perhaps participants have a better idea. If so, they are welcome to use it.
• Participants know themselves and what they need. They should feel free to trust the promptings of the Holy Spirit and their own faith-shaped instincts.
• If they begin an activity that doesn’t seem to work for them, encourage them not to abandon it immediately. However, if after 7–8 minutes it still does not feel comfortable, encourage them to try a different approach.

This is each person’s time to be alone with the Lord. Encourage participants to enjoy their freedom in Christ to use the time in the way they believe will best help them. Some may even want to nap! That’s okay, too.

Lunch

One of the retreat leaders should invite group members to join in prayer, thanking God for the meal. An impromptu prayer would be appropriate, or repeat the prayer you used at breakfast.
Session 4: Beauty Marks
Small-group discussion (45–60 minutes)

Key Scripture Verse: To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. Isaiah 61:3

Each person needs . . .
• A copy of the discussion pages (pp. 24–25)
• Bible
• Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord devotion book
• Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord notepad and pen

When about five minutes of the session remains, a retreat planner should note this for the whole group. When time has fully expired, call for everyone’s attention; ask for insights, comments, or questions; and respond appropriately.

Session 5: Beauty Reflected
Small-group discussion (45–60 minutes)

Key Scripture Verse: You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. Isaiah 62:3

Each person needs . . .
• A copy of the discussion page (pp. 26–27)
• Bible
• Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord devotion book
• Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord notepad
• A supply of craft materials—for example, Fun Foam, buttons, sequins, ribbon, markers, and other craft materials participants can use to illustrate Isaiah 62:3.
When about five minutes of the session remain, someone in retreat leadership should note this for the whole group. When time has fully expired, call for everyone’s attention; ask for insights, comments, or questions; and respond appropriately.

**Break**

Plan a 15–30-minute break, depending on the time available. Consider repeating this morning’s snack time. Those who will lead the worship can rearrange chairs and set up instruments, if necessary, during the intermission. If you will use song sheets or hymnals during the worship time, distribute them as participants enter the room. Or prepare the slides you will project with words to the hymns/songs you will use.

**Closing Devotion**

*Large-group session (15–20 minutes)*

Begin your closing worship with a prayer of thanks and perhaps two or three songs or hymns of praise.

Call attention to the poem on page 63 of *Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord*. Read it in unison—perhaps two or three times. Then pray the prayer at the bottom of the page. Repeat a worship chorus or hymn the group knows well and can sing with heartfelt adoration.

Speak this Scripture as a blessing:

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.** (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Read it together, blessing one another in Jesus’ name. Or have one of the retreat leaders pray it over the group.

Thank participants for coming and share any necessary housekeeping reminders.
Sample Retreat Schedule—

Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord

(Note: Adapt, adopt, and print one copy of this schedule for each retreat participant.)

It’s Time to Retreat—To Rest, Relax, Relate, and Renew

Friday

6:30  Arrival, unpacking, relaxing
7:00  Session 1: The Beauty of the Lord (small-group discussion)
7:45  Break
8:00  Session 2: A Beautiful Wardrobe (small-group discussion)
8:45  Evening Devotion (large-group session)
9:00  Time for Friends and Fun (large-group or small-group activities)

Saturday Morning

8:30  Breakfast
9:30  Session 3: Beauty Tips (small-group discussion)
10:30 Break
11:00 Reflection and Prayer (individual activity)
Noon  Lunch

Saturday Afternoon

1:15  Session 4: Beauty Marks (small-group discussion)
2:15  Break
2:45  Session 5: Beauty Reflected (small-group discussion)
3:45  Break
4:00  Closing Worship (large-group session)
4:15  Departure
Session 1: The Beauty of the Lord

**Key Scripture Verse:** Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us. Psalm 90:17 KJV

Unless your group leader has been pre-assigned, have the member of your group whose first name is closest to the end of the alphabet moderate your discussion. She should keep the group moving from question to question, using the time budget noted below. The rest of you are responsible for keeping the conversation progressing. Listen carefully to one another’s ideas and insights.

About 5 minutes

**Do you watch the Academy Awards Ceremony, the red carpet show that precedes it, or both? Explain.**

- What attracts viewers to the red carpet arrivals of the celebrities before the ceremony itself?
- What qualifies someone to consider himself or herself as one of the “beautiful people” there?

About 10 minutes

**Describe the most beautiful person you’ve ever known. What qualifies her or him for this honor in your eyes? (Be sure to allow each person in your group to answer this question.)**

About 15 minutes

**Read Psalm 90:17 from your Bible or this sheet.**

- Read in context, this verse is more than a pious wish. It’s a prayer. What exactly is the psalmist asking the Lord to do? Why might someone ask this?

- Think about the people who would pray a prayer like this. What adjectives would you use to describe them—wise, arrogant, fanciful, faith-filled, humble, or . . . ? Explain.

- Based on your discussion so far, work together to come up with a definition of beauty.
On page 3 of Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord, the author notes, “Only two percent of all women think of themselves as beautiful.” What does Psalm 90:17 say to the other 98%? What does it say to the 2%? In what way is it a comfort to 100%?

About 15 minutes

Read the devotion “Who Me? Beautiful?” from pages 10–11 in Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord, individually, or listen as one person in your group reads it aloud.

• What insights from this devotion strike you as especially comforting? helpful?

• What challenges you?

About 10 minutes

Think about a situation in your own life right now, one in which you feel less than lovely, one in which you wish you could more accurately reflect the beauty of the Lord. Maybe it’s a troubling relationship with a family member. Maybe it’s a problem at work or with a friend. Maybe it concerns a personal health or financial challenge. Choose a situation in which you long for “the beauty of the Lord” to descend and make a difference. What do you want to say to Jesus about it? Write it out in the white space on this sheet or on another piece of paper.

You will not be asked to share what you write with anyone else, so feel free to be as transparent and authentic as you can. Maybe you have lots of fears and deep worries. Or maybe you consider your concerns minor. Either way, it’s okay to write them. Jesus already knows—even more fully than you do—what’s in your heart and on your mind. He cares so deeply about you that he even died for you! You can be honest with him!
Session 2: A Beautiful Wardrobe

Key Scripture Verse: Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. . . . And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:12, 14

Unless your group leader has been pre-assigned, have the member of your group who is wearing the most pieces of jewelry moderate your discussion. She should keep the group moving from question to question, using the time budget noted below. The rest of you are responsible for keeping the conversation progressing. Listen carefully to one another’s ideas and insights.

5 minutes

In Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord, we read that each year the average woman shops for clothing some 90 times and for accessories 18 times (page 15). How do your shopping habits compare to these averages?

About 10 minutes

Colossians 3 reminds us who we are in Christ: “God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved . . .” You didn’t need to shop for this status, this truly exalted position. You didn’t earn it or deserve it. Instead, God gave it to you as His gift because of what Jesus has done for us on Calvary’s cross.

• What does it mean to you to know that God chose you to be his very own, to have an honored place in his family? What does it mean to know his love for you began even before he created the world, as Ephesians 1:4 tells us?

• What does it mean that God considers you “holy”—despite your disobedience and your failures to live up to your position as a daughter of heaven’s High King?

• What encouragement do you receive from knowing that, no matter what, you are “dearly loved”?

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If a billionaire tycoon or powerful monarch adopted us as his own daughters, he would likely not expect us to pack up our current wardrobe and bring it with us to the palace. We would be done with last year’s shoes, last month’s belts, and even yesterday’s necklaces! The king would graciously give us a new wardrobe, just as he gave us a new status as members of his family. That new wardrobe would befit our status as his daughters.

- What would you expect that wardrobe to be like? How would it feel to dress like that?
- Colossians 3:12–14 describes the “new wardrobe” we have received. It includes these pieces: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and love. Where do we get these new clothes? What are they like? How does it feel to wear them?
- Read the devotion entitled “Wondering What to Wear?” from pages 16–17 in Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord. What new insights does this devotion add to your thought process?

As a group, skim through the readings for Day 7, 8, and 9 in Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord. Decide which one (or two) to focus on for the next few minutes. Then have someone from your group read the selection aloud while the rest of you listen. After the reading, discuss the following questions:

- Why did you pick the reading(s) that you did?
- What did you hear that surprised or encouraged you?
- If you could write out a phrase or sentence and tape it to your bathroom mirror or refrigerator, which phrase or sentence would you choose? Share it with your group and tell why you picked it.

Read page 26, “Beauty Tips from the Inside Out.” Then, on the lines that follow or on another sheet, respond to the Scripture verse there and the open-ended thought-starter
at the bottom of the page. You will not be asked to share what you write with anyone else, so feel free to be as transparent and authentic as you can. Jesus already knows—completely—what’s in your heart and on your mind. He cares so deeply about you that he even died for you. You can be honest with him!
Session 3: Beauty Tips

Key Scripture Verse: One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. Psalm 27:4

Unless your group leader has been pre-assigned, begin by sharing with each other how old you were when you began to wear makeup. The person who was oldest when she first used foundation or lipstick or eye shadow will moderate this discussion. She should keep the conversation moving from question to question, using the time budget below. Remember to listen carefully to one another’s ideas and insights.

About 5 minutes

Take a few minutes for “girl talk.” As you think about the cosmetics you use, how would you finish this sentence starter: I wish . . .

About 10 minutes

Now focus on Psalm 27:4. Have a volunteer in your group read it aloud, slowly—twice.

• What words in particular stand out for you? Explain why they captured your attention.
• Why do you think the psalmist makes this request his only prayer, his “one thing”?
• What is “the beauty of the LORD”? How would you define or describe it?
• If you can, tell about a time when you found some aspect of our Lord’s beauty captivating. What made it so?

About 20 minutes

Now, read the devotion “Telling Hands” (Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord, pages 32–33).

• What do you imagine Jesus’ hands looked like when he lived here on earth? How do they look now?
• What do our Lord’s hands say about him and about us? What story do those hands tell?
• In what ways do your hands resemble our Lord’s? (Have each person in the group comment on someone else’s hands in answering this question, so that no one needs to comment about her own! Use this

(continued)
opportunity to encourage each other, but be sure to give God credit for working in and through each person of your group.

About 10 minutes

Read the devotion for Day 14, “Lovely Lips” (Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord, pages 34–35).

• Consider the words your Savior has spoken into your life. Which of those words do you count as among the loveliest? What makes those words beautiful?

• When is it easiest for you to speak lovely words into the lives of other people? When is it hardest?

• Which words from the devotion most strongly encourage you in your commitment to reflect the beauty of Christ in your words to and about other people?

About 10 minutes

The devotion for Day 15, “Heavenly Scent,” describes some of the ways in which our lives reflect the beauty of our Lord Jesus:

... the pleasing fragrance of patience and gentleness, forgiveness and joy. It’s the bouquet of encouraging words, the heavenly scent of willing service to those in need. It’s the lasting perfume of faith rooted in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, of hands uplifted in prayer, of hearts turned toward love of God and neighbor.

Spend a few minutes reflecting on these words and reviewing Psalm 27:4. Then turn this sheet over and use the space on the back to journal your thoughts or write a letter to your Savior in response. You may want to confess any sins that the Holy Spirit brings to mind. You may want to thank your Lord for his gracious presence and his work in and through you. Again, feel free to respond honestly; you will not be asked to share your writing with anyone unless you want to do that.
Reflection and Prayer
60 minutes individually

The next 60 minutes belong to you and to the Lord who is at work in you. You may use the time in whatever way(s) you believe will draw you closer to Jesus. **The suggestions below are just that—suggestions. Feel free to use one, two, all, or none of them. If you have a better idea, use it instead. You know yourself. You know what you need. Trust your faith-shaped instincts and your Savior’s direction. If you start down one path and find it’s a dead end, stop and try a different activity. In short, enjoy your freedom in Jesus. This is your time to be alone with your Lord. Make the most of it!**

- Take a prayer walk—indoors or out. If a chapel or prayer labyrinth is available at the retreat center where your group is gathered, consider spending time in the stillness there. Be sure to have your *Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord* devotion book with you. Use the Scriptures in it to shape your thoughts and prayers.

- Refer to one or more of the readings from *Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord*. Journal and pray about them. Write out key Scripture verses, considering each individual word in each verse. Listen to the truths the Holy Spirit is impressing on your heart. Respond to the Lord’s words of challenge and promise as you write out your response.

- Develop an artistic response to one or more of the ideas you’ve encountered so far during this retreat. Create a mini-poster featuring one or more Scriptures. Then illustrate its main idea. Or sketch an idea for a sculpture that communicates the truth of the verse, design a stained-glass window, or respond to the verse in some other artistic way. Or write a song of praise, using a familiar melody.

- Write a letter to Jesus expressing your thankfulness for the beauty he is creating in your life, beauty that reflects his own! Then write about concerns or decisions you face right now. Raise with your Savior any needs, ideas, issues, or dilemmas that have come to mind during the retreat so far or concerns you brought along with you. Ask Jesus to make this retreat a touch point of grace and that your time here will encourage you as you reflect his beauty in your daily life.

- Choose a psalm that describes the Lord’s beauty and what it means for us—for example, Psalms 23, 29, 46, 96, or one of your personal favorites. Read it through—several times, if possible. As you read, look for ways the psalmist describes or praises the beauty of the Lord. Journal or pray about it!
Session 4: Beauty Marks

Key Scripture Verse: To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. Isaiah 61:3

Unless your group leader has been pre-assigned, choose as moderator the person who is wearing the most colorful outfit—as judged by your group. She should keep the group moving from question to question, using the time budget noted below. Other group members will work to listen to each other and keep conversation moving along.

About 5 minutes

Based on Isaiah 61:3, fill in the following chart to show the contrasts the prophet describes. In each of the last two rows, add one of the word pictures from the end of the verse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beauty Marks</th>
</tr>
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<td>Beauty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garment of praise</td>
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About 20 minutes

Find Isaiah 61:3 in your Bible and check the context. Jesus would later quote vv. 1–2 and apply these words to himself in Luke 4:18–19.

- How has Jesus done for you what God promised in Isaiah 61:3?
- From time to time, most of us still experience days of “ashes,” times of mourning, or even a spirit of despair.

(continued)
Do those experiences mean God’s promise is false and his love fickle? If not, what can we make of the ashes and mourning we experience?

- Jesus came to earth, not to show us how to live, but to destroy the power of sin and death in us! He did that on the cross. He sealed it in his empty tomb. Now, we can live differently. We can reflect the beauty of the Lord, regardless of the circumstances we experience from day to day. We need not give in to unlovely thoughts, words, and actions, no matter who or what tries to provoke us. Tell about a time you have worn a “crown of beauty,” the “oil of gladness,” or a “garment of praise,” despite what you were going through. How did Jesus strengthen you during that time?

About 10 minutes

Read Isaiah 61:3 aloud again—perhaps in unison.

- According to this verse, you already are an “oak of righteousness.” What does this mean for you right now? What does it mean for your future?

- According to this verse, you already are “a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.” What does this mean for you right now? What does it mean for your future?

About 10 minutes

Have a volunteer read aloud the devotion for Day 19, titled “Cuts and Scrapes” (Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord, pages 44–45). What additional insights does this devotion provide? Which statements strike you as particularly important or compelling? Explain.

About 10 minutes

Now skim through one or more of the devotional readings from Day 16 through Day 20 in Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord. Pay special attention to the Bible passages on which each devotion is based. Which devotion most encourages or challenges you? Explain and share one key idea from it with your group.
Session 5: Beauty Reflected

**Key Scripture Verse:** You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. Isaiah 62:3

Unless your group leader has been pre-assigned, have a volunteer from your group moderate this final discussion. She should keep the group on track, using the time budget noted below. Everyone else should focus on contributing to the conversation in a meaningful way and listening carefully to the ideas and insights of others.

**About 15 minutes**

Use the craft materials provided to illustrate Isaiah 62:3. Incorporate some or all of the words from the verse into your design. As you work, ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand the passage more deeply.

When everyone in your group is finished, share answers to this question: *What insights did you gain from the verse and from this experience?*

**About 10 minutes**

Now have someone from your group read aloud the devotion for Day 24, “Daughters of the King” from pages 58–59 in *Reflecting the Beauty of the Lord*.

- How does the author explain your personal qualifications to wear a royal crown?
- What further information does Isaiah 35:10 add as it describes the eternal crown God has ready for us?
- What does all this say about God’s mercy toward you in Jesus?

**About 15 minutes**

Over the course of this retreat, you and your group have thought and talked a lot about beauty. Partner with one other person to talk about new perspectives you have gained and new ways of thinking you want to use in the weeks and months ahead. Talk over questions like these:

- What is beauty?

(continued)
• How might I use the outward, physical beauty God has given me to honor him?

• How might I better reflect to specific people around me the inner, spiritual beauty God is working in me?

• How might my life change if I kept in mind the Lord’s picture of me as a “crown of splendor,” a “royal diadem” in his hand? How could that happen?

Jot reminder notes and prayer requests for yourself and your partner in the space below. (Remember to keep what others confide in you strictly to yourself.)

After you’ve had opportunity to converse and exchange prayer requests, take time to pray with and for one another before you return to your group for this session’s final activity.

About 10 minutes

Consider the devotion for Day 25, “Unfading Beauty.” What final insights and encouragement does this reading provide?
Notes for Next Time