

Creative Submission: Art & Prose



Dying to Us

We rounded the corner and passed through the swinging brown church doors opened by a childhood friend who watched me grow up, me tripping in flowing white lace fighting to balance a bouquet of evergreen in one arm and another clinging to my Fathers armpit stuffed into a grey suit.

Yet the real fight was to try to balance my eyes, trying to take it all in, trying to lock eyes with every person there because there were too many staring eyes, all looking at *me*, and I was still desperate to meet all the layers of expectation those eyes had piled on me with every move I made growing up.

He whispered in my ear, “Take it all in, all these people are here for *you*.”

And, just like I had done for the entirety of my life, I tried. I tried to connect, tried to absorb, tried to please every dress and cardigan clad woman in that room and absorb it all.

This was the moment a young girl waits for, dreams of, when everyone in her life stands and watches her presence enter a room and acknowledges *her*.

But just like every other moment in my life, the pressure from people stole away from the presence of the moment and I faltered.

My breath caught in my throat, and my eyes couldn't move fast enough to all 342 grinning faces and all of the sudden we were at the end of the aisle and I finally notice the nervous blonde boy tripping down the steps to come replace my Fathers armpit with his warm hand.

And he whispers in my ear that I am beautiful, and I smile weakly back, realizing that I straight up forgot to look at my own husband as I walked down the aisle of my own wedding.

I was consumed by my interpretation of my Fathers words, desperate to please them and his instructions and meet their never ending church pew sitting expectations, as if that would fulfill this ever nagging desire to be approved and accepted as a Pastors kid.

They tell me when I walked through those doors, the one I was most loved and accepted by in that entire room, broke down and cried when his eyes met mine.

And I didn't even witness it.

I didn't even see those tears, because our eyes didn't quite meet; mine were racing about and fell firstly on the bouncy red head grinning a little bit too wide on the 5th church pew to the right.

Anonymous, Dying to Us

I couldn't get that moment back. Ever. I tried to drown my frustration of letting people pleasing win yet again by hoping and praying that most likely at least the video guy caught my husbands face on camera, so I could pretend to relive the 'most precious moment of my life'.

He didn't.

And neither did the hip photographer with the DSLR camera that shoots 20 photos every second.

They were like everyone else.

Their eyes and lenses focused on me, and my grimacing forced smile and darting eyes under the layer of cover up hiding a week of sleepless nights.

Doing what I always had done; Frantically and hastily meeting the eyes brim full of expectations and plans for my life, on my right and left, and neglecting to look up at the One with the tears in his eyes because of the love he has for me as his bride.

Frantically trying to please the people and forgetting about the love that is there, continuously, always.

That was the end in some senses, and the beginning in another sense.

It was the beginning of a death to what I had known, a death to what I thought ministry needed to entail. It represented a slow dying process in marriage that carried over to my life as a whole.

Would I choose to stay focused on the eyes that were always searching for me, or would I stray to please the people around me?

Would we choose to be broken and die to self in this process of marriage, in ministry, always looking to the father?

Or would we be forever distracted by the ever needing demands of others, or even of each other?

I am learning, we are learning. There is great growth in the dying process. But the dying must be leading me to focus my eyes straight down the aisle, into *His* eyes, not into the eyes of the people.

For it is only in dying that we can ever become like Him. And it is only in becoming like Him that we can ever give anything good to the people staring back at us.





ARTIST STATEMENT

In my younger days it was easy to see the command 'to die to yourself' in the heroic, outer ways that often allude to outward praise; Going to intense places for the gospel, late nights and early mornings, all for the sake of the "kingdom". Always seeing busyness next to godliness.

And then you get married and begin to do ministry with your spouse, and realize that maybe the most impactful deaths to self aren't the ones that look great and heroic on the outside, but rather, are those that no one else sees or gives you credit for.

My husband's eyes don't sparkle naively like they did on our wedding day, but there is deep wisdom and humility in them now. It came from the knowing that the death Christ calls us to is that slow, underground breaking, where no one else sees or pats us on the back.

Maybe it is not in valiant attempts to be a great ambassador for the gospel that we die to self, but rather, in the small ways of continuing to let our spouses and children be used to refine us and define us in ways that ministry cannot.

It can be easy to hide behind the facade of a great looking, sacrificial life. But the reality is, when marriage and ministry come together, we must be willing to lean in together, and let ourselves die to what we have known in order to make His name known.

That might mean slow seasons of leaning in together and letting the death of us prevail so that something of worth may eventually sprout.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” John 12:24

ARTIST BIO

Author is a Vanguard College alumnus that wrestles with accepting the ways that things have always been done and seeking to live life in a way that challenges cultural norms. They do this by living cross culturally here in Canada and sharing the ways and life of Jesus with youth from various religious and cultural backgrounds. They have chosen to remain anonymous to protect those youth and this ministry.