

An aerial photograph of the ocean, showing a series of waves moving from the top left towards the bottom right. The water is a deep blue-grey color, with white foam visible on the crests of the waves. The lighting is soft, creating a textured surface on the water.

APOLOGETICS IN  
THE WAY OF JESUS

*a guide to seeing Jesus in all things*

*by Jessica Fadel*

# INTRODUCTION

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*I hear you in the wind...*

To share our Christian faith with others can sometimes feel risky and challenging. We can be misunderstood, and we are often misrepresented by false versions of Christianity that pervade our culture. Yet, there are whispers of God all around us—not just in sermons or in Bible verses, but in the ordinary and extraordinary things that have been created. As we walk patiently with others and seek to communicate Jesus with them, we must weed through many false assumptions and listen well to many deep and true hurts.

So as we seek to communicate to those who may be searching or running from the truth, we are helped by observing and imitating how God Himself has communicated with us, learning from what he says and especially how he says it: with kindness, love, truth, and gentleness.

To do that, we will look at four categories that describe how God communicates to his people visually, verbally, virtuously, and vulnerably.

*Job 12:7–9*  
*The Message*

*But ask the animals what they think—  
let them teach you;*

*let the birds tell you what's going on.  
Put your ear to the earth—learn the basics.☒*

*Listen—the fish in the ocean  
will tell you their stories.*

*Isn't it clear that they all know and agree  
that God is sovereign,*

*that he holds all things in his hand*



# VISUALLY

Through creation, our very first introduction to God in Genesis, we see that our God communicates to us through our sense of sight. We are able to see the beauty of nature, the peaks of high mountains, the gentle falling snow, the colors of a rainbow, and the changing leaves of autumn.

*He is an artist.*

Through his artistry, we are given the colors to paint, the hands to create, the mind to wonder, imagine, and delight in all the beauty that surrounds us. All people, not just Christians, have access to these signs in creation. Each person can see the glory of a sunset and witness the gentle falling of rain.

And so in turn, we, like our Creator, are able to create. Through paintings, poems, film, music, sculptures, and more, we are able to echo the artistry of our Creator.

To illustrate this idea, we will look at a film more carefully as one way to communicate visually with apologetic sensitivity to our friends and neighbors.



*ARRIVAL*

# ARRIVAL

Films are able to portray and communicate the stories of our world through powerful imagery. As they echo the creativity and beauty that God displayed through creation, films are able to attract viewers with compelling visuals. Sometimes the themes and concepts of the Bible can be hard for people to comprehend or grasp, but seeing certain truths expressed on the big screen can provide a way for someone to understand truth in a new way. Even when the goal is not to explicitly communicate the gospel, film can bring to light gospel principles through engaging characters and scenes.

A great example of this is in one of my favorite films, *Arrival*. Louise, the main character, is able to see her future with her husband, Ian, and their daughter. The cinematographer, without using any dialogue, shows that their daughter will inevitably suffer death because of a rare form of cancer. Louise sees the pain and the hurt that comes from the death of their daughter, including the fact that her husband leaves her for a time to process the impending loss.

And although it showed pain and hurt by using dark lighting and close-up shots, it also showed beauty through their relational intimacy. It showed love and laughter. It showed that even though someone can see that there will be pain and suffering, they will still endure those things in order to experience the gift of life. Our world sometimes tells us that a life of suffering is not a life worth preserving. Louise, even though she knew the pain her daughter would face, chose to have her daughter anyway. She saw that the chance at life and love was worth the pain. In all of this, I can't help but be reminded of my own experiences in life and how Jesus and his truth has spoken so gently to my deep pains and sorrows. Pain and suffering, although often looked at only negatively, can reveal true love and beauty. And a film like this can cause its watchers to consider and wonder how we think about and measure the value of life.

# VERBALLY

God also communicates to us verbally. Through his words, light entered the cosmos, and through his words came man. Words and names were given to creatures in order to identify them. God spoke to Adam and to Eve to give instruction and inhabit relationship. He has given us his words in the form of a book called the Bible. He has given us prophets, priests, and leaders who communicate his words to us. And he has given us Jesus, the very Word that has been made flesh.

*His words bring life.*

His words not only remain as ink on pages, but they continue to move throughout time and history. They are living and active, as the writer of Hebrews states. His words have power to calm crashing waves and to remove blindness from broken eyes; his very words call the dead to rise. His words bring healing and lift up the weary and tired.





*LEMONADE:  
BY BEYONCÉ*

# LEMONADE: BY BEYONCÉ

I have always been captivated, as I think most people are, by story. And for me, the combination of good story-telling and imaginative and spatial imagery has been a way to enter into new worlds and thoughts. Similarly, music and lyrics also have the power to tell stories using poetic phrasing and intriguing combinations of sounds that can so helpfully punctuate what we see.

One of the most compelling pieces of art that I have seen, using all of the above-mentioned devices, is Beyoncé's visual album, *Lemonade*. Although I have been familiar with Beyoncé's music and life, I would not have identified as one of her fans. Not because I disliked her, but simply because I didn't follow her career or music very closely. But, when I heard the "buzz" around her album and the rumors of the narrative that inspired it, I signed up for a free trial of Tidal and watched *Lemonade* one afternoon.

It was nothing like I had expected or experienced before.

As the themes of Intuition, Denial, Anger, Apathy, Emptiness, Accountability, Reformation, Forgiveness, Resurrection, Hope, and Redemption scrolled across the screen, all of my senses were attuned to her story. Not only were there beautiful words, lyrics, themes, and music, but there were stunning visuals. I saw the beauty of color and women. Their curves and their hair. The tones of dark and light. Cleansing water, and how time and processing can bring healing. There were moments of silence, wonder, and even confusion. Themes of infidelity, black identity, oppression, baptism, marriage and family, loss, pain, and Christian ideas were woven throughout. Whispers of questioning the one that is supposed to love you. "Are you cheating on me?", she asks. We see her soul, she shares her most vulnerable longings and questions with us. Her hardest moments are lived out in front of us.

# LEMONADE: BY BEYONCÉ

As she shares her process of hearing the news that her husband has been unfaithful to her, we are invited into her story. To experience her pain. To share it with her. She's honest and brave, and she speaks truthfully about what she felt, even when it doesn't make her look good.

Personally, I usually identify first with the pain in someone's story. But I also found myself deeply moved in the latter half of her story. When I came to hear the first notes of Sandcastles with the sharp lyrics proclaiming reconciliation, my heart stopped. There is an immediately-recognizable shift. Silence, quiet, peace, calm. Just Beyoncé and the piano--simple images in black and white. It's stripped back and we see the first glimpse of her husband. She welcomed him back, even though she didn't think it would be possible. It's a beautiful picture of redemption, as she says.

She gets it right. She understands forgiveness and redemption. She is longing for more and sees a way forward. She explains it better than many or most. Better, even, than some artists who may make the gospel seem cheap, trite, or mundane. As if forgiveness is easy. As if in our attempts to forgive, there is no pain or struggle, or that we don't have doubts in the midst of it.

Beyoncé showed me that forgiveness is other-worldly, and she demonstrated the great spectrum of emotion that can be experienced in order to truly deal with a pain as significant as betrayal. Perhaps this helps us to see how the forgiveness we experience in Jesus is unutterably profound.

*We, like the writer of Ecclesiastes, the Psalmist, and like Beyoncé, have the chance to speak honestly about our world. We can honestly and wholeheartedly name the struggles, the injustices, the heartaches, the losses, and the pains. There is so much to learn and be gained from this way of storytelling. And when we communicate truth, like we see in this deeply meaningful visual album, we point beauty that is outside ourselves, and we give a reason for the hope that is within us.*



# VIRTUOUSLY

God, in creating the world, showed us his virtue—his goodness. As each flower was formed and each nose shaped, he called his creation good—it was full of dignity, truth, and beauty. God, by calling the things he created good, speaks honestly about his creation and he speaks rightly about the world. And when sin entered his good world, he called the sin by its right name. God speaks truthfully about the good and the bad without being trite or simple. As he does this, we see his goodness in many ways. We see that he upholds goodness and truth, cares about injustices, and grieves sin and death.

Similarly, God shows that he is good by extending his goodness to all people. As the ancient writer Matthew states, the rain falls on the good and the bad. God allows the work of both laborers to bear fruit. Christians—and people who are other than Christian—are able to experience the goodness of God through his good creation and through his good gifts—ultimately because he is so good.

When we are seeking to communicate God's truth with others, we can be virtuous in our communication by calling things by their right names—good and bad. We can grieve with those who grieve and rejoice with those who rejoice, sharing and showing the good gifts that God has given to us and all people.



*Matthew 4:45  
The Message*

*He gives his best—the sun to warm  
and the rain to nourish—to everyone,  
regardless: the good and bad...*



*AFTER THE  
STORM*

By: Marcus Oliver Johnstone Mumford,  
Winston Aubrey Aladar Marshall,  
Edward James Milton Dwane, Benjamin  
Walter David Lovett

# AFTER THE STORM

And after the storm,  
I run and run as the rains come  
And I look up, I look up,  
on my knees and out of luck,  
I look up.

Night has always pushed up day  
You must know life to see decay  
But I won't rot, I won't rot  
Not this mind and not this heart,  
I won't rot.

And I took you by the hand  
And we stood tall,  
And remembered our own land,  
What we lived for.

And there will come a time, you'll see, with no more tears.  
And love will not break your heart, but dismiss your fears.  
Get over your hill and see what you find there,  
With grace in your heart and flowers in your hair.



# AFTER THE STORM

In these lyrics by Mumford and Sons, we see an acknowledgment of many good things. Longing for a place where there are no more tears, where death is abolished and there is no more rot or decay, and a place where love dismisses our fears. Lyrics like this help us to see and affirm the longing for the goodness of God and his good gifts. Through these words, we see an honesty that things are not as they should be. We can be sure that throughout the Bible, those who follow after God both speak rightly about our broken world and about their Lord. It is in God, the holder of all goodness, that we see these questions and longings heard, known, and answered. He indeed will make all things right in the end, with no more tears or sorrow, and his perfect love will cast out all of our fears. In this, we can see the echoes of our good God.

# VULNERABLY

by giving us hands  
that we could bruise him

by giving us mouths  
that we could curse him

by giving us eyes  
that we could turn our gaze away

by giving us feet  
that we could leave him

by giving us minds  
that we could reason him away

senses given for good

# VULNERABLY

In God's greatness, there is still room for misunderstanding him, for mishearing his words, and for not remembering him or his goodness. Through our hands, we can craft idols and worship lesser things. With our lips, we can sing praises to things and people that do not deserve our worship. With our minds, we can reason God away with our calculations and scientific proof. Through all of this, God has made himself vulnerable to us. God is susceptible to grief and pain. In the garden, Adam and Eve rejected him. In the wilderness, the Israelites formed another god. And on the cross, the Vulnerable One--who came with gentleness and truth--was crucified: naked, exposed, mocked, mistreated, despised.

We see this throughout the life of Jesus, too. Jesus isn't concerned with celebrity or with getting the credit for his good works. He isn't concerned with pleasing crowds or bowing to cultural expectations. Instead, Jesus is vulnerable in the ways that he communicates. He draws near to the broken and lonely. He gathers outsiders, including those who may damage his reputation. He chooses the weak, the faithless, and the meek and in doing so, he shows his grace and gentleness.

One way we can understand these ideas more is to look at the way that Jesus describes himself and the Father: as a shepherd, as a sheep, as a father, and a farmer, as a woman, as a brother, lowly, meek, gentle, and mild.

# VULNERABLY

Through these descriptions and through the many stories of Jesus, we see the value of vulnerability in our communication to others. We do not have to fear being wrong, not having the right answer, or appearing to lose the argument. We can show Christ-likeness to others by being vulnerable in our posture and demeanor as we engage others.

Jesus moves toward people relationally and gently. Although there are times when he rebukes with firmness, most of these instances are with the Pharisees and religious people. Jesus is a friend to the skeptic, a listener to the cynic, and is kind to the agnostic.

In all these instances, we learn from Jesus what our posture should be toward those who are other than Christian as he treats people with care and understanding.

*AGNUS DEI*

By: Francisco de Zurbarán



# VULNERABLY



In his painting, *Agnus Dei*, artist Francisco de Zurbarán paints a small lamb bound by the legs, waiting on an altar. We see a black background with the main subject, the lamb, highlighted in the forefront, which was a signature of de Zurbarán's paintings. The lamb looks calm and does not look distressed. Instead, it is lying in wait for its destiny. You may feel a sense of sadness for this animal. You may find that the way it is positioned and bound causes you to feel sympathy. What will happen to this lamb? What has it done to deserve this fate?

Although de Zurbarán was a religious artist, this work reached many audiences and people, likely because it wasn't seen as particularly religious in nature, at least at first glance.

This theme of sacrifice is also prevalent in many books and movies. There are whole websites dedicated to seeing Christ figures in fictional narratives. In these stories of sacrifice, we are often prompted to watch in amazement as a character may give up something of their own—power, wealth, fame, status, relationship, even their own life—for the sake of others.

These types of stories give us the opportunity to show others how Jesus is vulnerable in his coming to rescue his people, and how his vulnerability led to his costly love.



*John 1:10-11*  
*The Message*

*He was in the world,  
the world was there through him,  
and yet the world didn't even notice.  
He came to his own people,  
but they didn't want him.*



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All content was taken and inspired from  
Jessica and Zack Eswine's class notes on  
Apologetic Communication, particularly the  
four v's of communication.

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September 2018

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