

OCTOBER DEAL
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THE ANGEL AND THE VOYAGER
By Kenneth Boa



Beauty is a Trojan horse for goodness and truth. An encounter with beauty and story speaks to the heart and lowers the defenses of the watching dragons of critical objections. The Angel and the Voyager was designed with this in mind, because it is a beautiful book about a richly aesthetic portrayal of our brief voyage on the river of earthly life. The beauty points to the goodness and truth of the gospel — the good news that embeds this life in a living hope that will not disappoint.

THE PROMISES OF GOD

THE BLESSINGS OF BEING WATCHED

In the New Testament, the Christian life is often likened to the development of a child. Many images, from that of being “born again” (John 3:3, 7), to Paul’s words about developing intimacy with the Father (Rom. 8:15), lend themselves to that comparison. But there is another aspect of childhood that is much like the spiritual walk: the way we respond to a parent’s presence.

As children develop and discover that they have a will of their own, they resent the “omnipresence” of their parents. Just when they think it’s safe to get an extra cookie out of the cookie jar, in walks Mom. Maturity in childhood, and in the spiritual life, comes when we stop trying to get around authority and start basking in the light and protection of it.

This idea is expressed in Psalm 121, one of the most beloved of the Psalms. God is like that watchful parent. How many times have we seen on television—or experienced ourselves—waiting up for a child who is due to return from an outing? That’s a pale comparison to the image the psalmist creates for us here: God the ultimate protector, God the ever-watchful, God the never-slumbering.

The psalmist David also marveled that there was nowhere he could go where he would be beyond the watchful and protective eye of God (Ps. 139:7–12). From the heights of heaven to the depths of the sea, from the rising to the setting of the sun, God was (and is) there.

There was a time when David probably resented this all-seeing eye of God, a time when he was less mature. The only way God could have known to send Nathan to rebuke David

for adultery with Bathsheba was if God had witnessed David in the act (which, of course, He did; 2 Sam. 11–12). But in David in Psalm 139 and in the author of Psalm 121, we find two people who love the feeling of always being watched.

Are there times when you wish God weren’t always watching you? The more you experience the benefits of His presence, the more you will come to appreciate never being out of His sight.

God’s Promise:

As a Father, He delights in watching over you, His child.

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A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart

SERVING
ONE
MASTER

Father, Your Word teaches that the freedom You have given us in Christ is not the libertarian freedom to do whatever we want to do. That form of freedom leads to selfishness and the painful consequences of self-indulgence. When we try to do things in our way and in our timing, this ultimately diminishes our freedom, because we are attempting to live life on our own terms. Too many of us who profess to be followers of Christ are trying to play by two sets of rules at once. But You have made it clear that we must choose to serve only one master. Service to the world and to self is not freedom, but bondage. But service to Christ Jesus is the source of perfect freedom. As I follow You and live life in Your Spirit, new options open up before me. Now as I walk by the Spirit, I can choose to be pleasing to You and to reflect the righteousness of Your Son.

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The Solution to the Dilemma of Mortality

This article is an excerpt from *The Angel and the Voyager: What Thomas Cole's Voyage of Life and Course of Empire Paintings Tell Us about the Meaning of Life* by Kenneth Boa, Louisa Baker, and Michael Stewart

Why Are We Here and Where Are We Going?

Art – in all its vibrant, varied forms – wields a singular power to simultaneously reflect and reveal: reflecting what we know to be true from our own life journeys and revealing destinations of paths bypassed or yet untaken. The insight and creativity of an artist through this universal medium invites access to and assessment of what appeals to and affects each individual mind and heart. Art can powerfully portray the universality of our time on earth: the natural life cycle of birth, growth, decay, and death. This process, once begun, marches forward at its own pace, indifferent to the qualms and delights of man. We are all in this process together, and we know it. Yet the passage of time, like the movement of clouds, is just slow enough that it is, at least most of the time, almost imperceptible.

Without fail, the older we get, the more compressed our earthbound sojourn tends to feel, forcing us to confront the brevity of our time on this planet. (This compression of time can occur sooner in our lives if we face an early loss of a loved one, major health problems, or other crises.) Whenever life's fleetingness hits us, aspirations (wealth, success, approval) that once held so much appeal begin to lose their luster, and the chipping veneer alights in us a yearning for a more permanent, incorruptible source of hope.

Thomas Cole: The Moralist and Autodidact

Thomas Cole was a British-American painter born in Bolton le Moors, Lancashire, England, in 1801, and raised in Steubenville, Ohio. Largely self-tutored, Cole represents the archetypal American figure of the autodidact. In his twenties, he moved to Philadelphia and then to Catskill, New York.



The latter remained his home except for a few years spent abroad until his early death at age forty-seven. Although he is best known for his landscape art, he began his career in the early 1820s as a portrait painter.

Cole is widely regarded as the founder of the Hudson River School art movement, an informal group comprising landscape painters influenced by European Romanticism and American expansionism in their idyllic depictions of the American landscape.

In his art, there is an immediate interplay between the pristine beauty of the breathtaking landscapes and the foreboding destruction brought on by civilization. Marked by a distinctive melancholy and religious undertones, Cole's paintings are imbued with moralistic motifs that expose his own complex, evolving feelings about what he saw as the cyclical nature of life. As an artist, Cole saw his creative capacity as a directive to effect positive change. He wrote, "I have been dwelling on many subjects, and looking forward to the time when I can embody them on the canvas. They are subjects of a moral and religious nature. On such I think it the duty of the artist to employ his abilities: for his mission, if I may so term it, is a great and serious one. His work ought not to be a dead imitation of things without the power to impress a sentiment or enforce a truth."

The Solution to the Dilemma of Mortality

Through allegorical landscapes bursting with spiritual symbolism, Thomas Cole leveraged the beauty and glory of the natural world to explore the purpose of our limited time on earth. The Voyage of Life and The Course of Empire advise us not to mistake creation for the Creator, and instead to put our faith in the eternal God, investing in those things which He tells us are essential and which last forever. Jesus spoke of these eternal investments in Matthew 22:37–39:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

God desires to welcome you into His eternal presence with open arms. The Bible teaches that we need only trust Jesus for the eternal life He offers us, a free gift secured on our behalf through Christ's death for our sins and subsequent resurrection.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23

"But as many as received Him, He gave them the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." John 1:12

The pervading imagery of the cross found in his artwork suggests that, to Cole, faith is about

more than religiosity. Notice in Expulsion. Moon and Firelight a beam of light forms a cross with the bridge between the fallen world and the Paradise of God. It is suggestive of that which bridges death and life: the Cross of Christ.

Cole's own premature death left one of his final landscapes unfinished. Its name is fitting: Cross at Sunset.

During our brief earthbound sojourn, we are being prepared for our true home as citizens of heaven. This is the solution to the dilemma of mortality. If the best moments of beauty, intimacy, and adventure in life create longings in us—just imagine what their fulfillment will be.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:3–5

If you want to learn more about Thomas Cole's allegorical journey through the river of life, Dr. Kenneth Boa has an evening lecture on The Angel and the Voyager he would love to share with your group. info@kenboa.org

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