

The Art Of Living For Jesus

By J. Todd Hostetler

We can live a successful and fulfilling life and even more importantly, one that glorifies Jesus! I know that sounds foreign due to our life experiences. I also know it is easy to get sidetracked by all of the struggles and difficulties life presents. That may have been our past but that does not have to be our today. We can certainly make our tomorrow the former instead of the latter. How can we do that? We just have to learn the art of living for Jesus. There truly is an art to living for Jesus. Become skilled in that art and our lives will illustrate the beauty of our Savior. Develop the art of living this way, and we become His works of art for the world to behold. We become His works of art that draw both the eye and the heart of many to Jesus, not unlike the brushstrokes of Da Vinci still draw millions to the Last Supper.

You may not feel like a work of art today, but understand you are work in progress. Michelangelo did not complete the Sistine Chapel in a day, but it became a unique creation added to daily by the hand of the master. If I receive the daily touches of His brushstroke to my life, the final product will have an impact well beyond my own lifetime, because I have submitted to the hand of the Master Artist. Is this possible for you? Of course it is. God is a creative God, and He has already begun a good work in you and me. We are told in Philippians 1:6, *“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;”* We just have to submit to the vision of the Artist, so He can finish His good work in us.

We may not always feel the hand of the Artist at work, but it is. Don't go by what you feel but by the promise of His Word. If you go by what you feel, you will probably think your life more accurately reflects modern art that, by appearance, is indiscernible and chaotic. But God is a God of order, and He can still make your life into His eternal masterpiece.

Picturing God as an artist is an apt illustration because the artist, regardless of the genre of his art, is creating something new. God by His nature is creative. In fact, this is the first characteristic that God reveals about Himself. As a whole, I look at the Bible as a means of God revealing Himself to us, and the very first words that He speaks to us in that revelation, are these from Genesis 1:1, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*

God is, by His own nature, creative. He wants us to know that about Him so we can submit our lives to Him, like a canvas to the Master painter. His astonishingly creative work will make what appears to be a mess, beautiful beyond description. Submitting to the Master is at the heart of the art of living for Jesus.

With that willing and expectant submission, we come to the next great renaissance of our lives. Renaissance, by definition, is a period of artistic and intellectual activity. That renaissance arrives when we discern another revelation God gives us in the first chapter of Bible; that we

are created in His own image! In the first chapter of Genesis, and in verse 27 we read, “*So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*” You might say that we have His spiritual DNA in us, so we, then, also have His creative nature within us. With this understanding, I can now see that if I fail to exercise that essential element of who I am, there remains a component of me that is undeveloped. Nothing else in life can fill that void. It is a part of His nature He created in me that must be attended to, matured and refined just like every other part of my being. Until I utilize, explore and develop that creative nature, I will feel fragmented, without form and deficient. Those are three well-chosen words, because when reading them many of us will say, “That’s it! That describes what I feel but could never put into words.” Your creative DNA is dormant and needs to be explored and put to use for His glory.

As in most things, the first step is to seek Him. Ask Him to reveal to you what creative outlets will satisfy you and make you feel complete. After all, He put that creative nature in you. Then just begin to scout out what avenues will give expression to His indwelt creative nature. Try what previously seemed unrealistic to you. It is in this process of probing your creative DNA that you will discover what will satisfy that creative element in you. It does not have to be beautiful by the world’s standard, just give way to expression and let His creative nature take its course through you. Then suddenly, the dimension of you that felt formless and void will begin to take shape. You will discover passions, awakened in you, that release energy and excitement, where you previously felt dry, withered and with nothing left to offer.

His creative nature is in you just seeking expression through you. Until you begin to delve into your creative nature, you are like a slab of marble before the sculptor. The beauty of Michelangelo’s *David* was always inside the marble, but the chisel had to begin to remove the excess stone until the work of art was revealed. Until you put your hand to giving expression to your creative nature, you will feel like a misshapen slab of stone; rough, uncut and incomplete. Feel that way now? Then put your hand to revealing His creative nature in you, and you will find that you are truly His work of art. In fact, you will be stunned by the Masterpiece He is revealing in you. You are His work of art, but until we give conveyance to that creativity, we cannot hope to succeed in the art of living for Jesus. As long as that creativity is inhibited without release, it will remain unresolved mental and emotional irritation, and anguish in our lives.

In review, we have acknowledged that God is a creative God, and that creativity is a part of His nature. Further, we have arrived at the conclusion that because we are created in His image, we have His creative nature within us. That nature requires expression for us to feel well formed and usable. The next step in the art of living for Jesus is vital for us to accept. The creativity we speak of is not limited solely to what we might consider to be artistic endeavors. If you will meditate on this, you will realize that creativity is expressed in many ways that are truly artistic, in that they reveal the beauty of Jesus and His creation. They reveal the beauty of Jesus within us, expressed outwardly through us. Those expressions may not fall into the conventional

categories we label as art.

His creative nature in you can be released in innovations that benefit the world around us. These are also part of the art of living to the glory of Jesus. Allow me to explain what I mean. Even artistic neophytes like me can delight in some of the most historical works of art. We join the millions who through the centuries have been awestruck by works like Michelangelo's *Pieta*, da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, Monet's *Water Lilies* and Rodin's *The Thinker*. All of these classic works of art were created by men who were themselves created in the image of God, possessing His creative nature. Whether they realized it or not, they merely gave expression to the creative nature that is invested in man for the purpose of giving glory to Jesus. God is a creator and His creation reflects His creative nature.

Creative or artistic expressions certainly include what are considered to be "the arts". Things like painting, sculpting, writing, musical composition, dance, playing a musical instrument and the like. But creative expressions that are works of art themselves go well beyond that. It includes all things that demonstrate the creative nature of Jesus within us, which can literally be found in every form of human endeavor we apply ourselves to. Every task where you apply the knowledge, ability and skill that He has gifted you with, affords an opportunity to express your creative nature to His glory. For example, if you are an organizer, consider that there is a true artistic creativity in taking chaos and bringing it into beautiful order. That is God and that is what God did in the creation story itself.

Here is another example. In every employment occupation there is an established way of doing things. However, as believers in Jesus, we can find innovative ways to do those same things; ways that no man, outside of Jesus, would ever conceive or think possible or workable. That is creativity and it creates artistic advances. In general, there are problems out there that seem unsolvable to the world. However, the believer in Jesus, possessing the nature of His Savior within him, will find beautifully creative solutions that no one else would ever think of, things the flesh alone could never imagine or foresee. That is the art of living creatively in Jesus and that brings satisfaction to the artist in you. It is you advancing the kingdom of God to His glory!

When I ponder things such as this, I conclude that part of the reason the church has lost its influence in the world, is because its people have not developed those creative skills. They have failed to use them to draw people to Jesus, like the works of Rembrandt draw people to the Louvre. Lodging within you are innovations and creative expressions of all kinds waiting to be birthed from the creative nature of God within you.

God depicts this reality to us from the Biblical account of King Uzziah. He was gifted by God with the ability to create things that others could not imagine. The Bible tells us that King Uzziah invented machines that would both accomplish the will of God and also safeguard the people of God. Listen to this description of the creative nature of King Uzziah artfully expressed for the purpose of progressing the will of God. We read this from 2 Chronicles 26:15, and it is shared here from the Expanded Bible: "*In Jerusalem, Uzziah made ·cleverly [expertly;*

carefully] designed ·devices [machines]. These ·devices [machines] on the towers and corners of the city walls were used to shoot arrows and large rocks. So Uzziah became famous in faraway places, because he ·had much help until he became [was marvelously/tremendously helped to become] powerful.”

When the world sees the elegance of God’s creative nature in you, they will take note, and they will be drawn to Jesus through the artistry of your creativity. Hopefully, you are already stirred with excitement to revive that creative spirit within you. The next action you need to undertake is the elimination of those disquieting self-doubts. It is the nature of the flesh to doubt your own abilities and assume that this kind of creative expression is beyond you. Perhaps your past experience suggests that creativity has been so elusive, you are hesitant to put yourself out there by giving expression to your creative nature. Perhaps you are still not certain you have the ability to release this nature in a satisfying

For a little background, it is helpful to understand the relationship between the magnificence of the spiritual realm and this flawed natural world we dwell in. The heavenly realm has an eternal beauty beyond what we can conceive while living in the tents of these bodies. While these natural minds cannot conceive of such beauty, if we look, we get a glimpse of it in the things of His creation. Everything in God’s creation points to something greater, something we can behold with our spiritual eyes but not our natural eyes. Look at His creation with spiritual eyes that behold or perceive with an inner spiritual perception. God wants us to see glimpses of the beauty of the eternal realm. We see evidence of that while the Israelites were in the wilderness. God instructed Moses to create a tabernacle based on the things of heaven that God had shown Moses on the mountain. The tabernacle then was a natural realm portrayal of the spirit realm reality. He was using artistic creativity through the hands of man to point to even better things to come in eternity. This is the function of art in all its forms. When His creative nature is released through us, what is revealed (regardless of its form), is a glimpse into the divine! This is why the thought of creative expression is both simultaneously exciting and intimidating.

This leads us to the Israelite man in the wilderness whom you have probably never heard of, but who is our inspiration. He reveals the talent to create, a talent not dependent upon trained or educated skills. No, the talent, like the creative nature itself, was invested in him by God. It is His skill that He imparts to you. Follow where He leads you in artistic expression and you will find yourself saying, “I never knew I had that talent before!” That is because it is not your talent, it is His talent poured into you if you will take the liberty to employ it.

God instructed Moses to build the tabernacle, but it would take a great many artistic abilities to create all the elements of it, artistic abilities that none of the Hebrews had training for. God gave all those talents to a man named Bezalel, to reveal to all a glimpse into the divine. Bezalel was formerly a slave in Egypt with all the Hebrews, so his only previous creative experience consisted of making Pharaoh’s bricks, not exactly proper training for the higher forms of art.

But the skill and talent all came directly from God to Bezalel through the Holy Spirit. We read this from the book of Exodus chapter 31, verses 2 through 5. ³*“And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship,* ⁴*to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze,* ⁵*in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship.”*

God is a creative God, and you are created in His image. God’s creative nature is in you and it is powered by the Holy Spirit in you as a believer in Jesus Christ. Give place to that creative expression and you will give the world a glimpse into the eternal beauty that is hidden by this flesh. Creative expression, in whatever form you are gifted, is a powerful way to imitate our creator! Learn what your artistic gifts are, then develop them and activate them to His glory. Consider what God spoke to us through Paul in Ephesians 2:10. I share this with you from the Expanded Bible: ¹⁰*“God has made us what we are [^LFor we are his handiwork/workmanship/work of art]. In Christ Jesus, God made [created] us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.”*

The word “works” in that verse certainly indicates the good service He has planned for us to do in this life as we represent Him to the world. But that Greek word for “works” also means “any product whatever, anything accomplished by hand, art, industry or mind.” Use your hands (art), your industry (organization), and mind (creative solutions) along with every other creative outlet that is in you to create works of art for Him through your life.

God gave Bezalel the skills, creativity and knowledge to do all the occasion demanded for creating the tabernacle. Today you are the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit and your covenant is better than that of Bezalel. Bezalel, of the Old Testament, reminds us of Michelangelo and fills us with excitement at the undiscovered talents and abilities that are invested in each of us, just waiting to be released and developed. Michelangelo had perhaps a greater variety of artistic and creative skills than any man since the days of Bezalel. Perhaps the secret of Michelangelo was in His belief that his talents were given to him by God and he was charged with using them for God’s glory. Give expression to the creative nature in you for His glory. Allow Him to develop those gifts, and He will then reveal even more gifts within you. You have talents beyond what you ever believed you possessed. Michelangelo is evidence to us that if we use the skills He gave us to express His glory He will impart even more and greater skills to us.

One of the greatest artists of the 1800s, who is still loved today, is Claude Monet. His works like “The Water Lily Pond” still are cherished as some of the best work of the Impressionists. But Monet never gave glory to God for the creative talent that had been invested in him. As a result, Monet suffered from the frustration of never achieving what he envisioned or aspired to produce. He said this was because the “artist’s grasp always exceeds his reach”. Monet meant that he had a vision in his mind of what he wished to produce on the canvas. Because of the creative nature of God within him, he could see it. He could see the divine beauty, but in himself and serving only self, he could never produce it. His work always fell short of what he

knew was possible. What he grasped for was only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the man God gave those creative and artistic talents to. Our creative expressions are for the Glory of Jesus, not self. For this reason, Monet suffered through a lifetime of creative artistic frustration. His grasp for the divine always exceeded the reach of his flesh.

The great news for us who understand these spiritual principles is that in Jesus our creative grasp will never exceed our natural reach. The composer of the Handel's Messiah, George Frideric Handel, demonstrates this truth to us. Considered one of the great composers of his day, as the years slipped by, he found newer composers had passed him by. Handel became overlooked and he came to a time of great financial struggle. Then he suffered a stroke that paralyzed him on the right side. His career by all appearances was definitively over. But he willed himself back to health. He was given a poem and asked by the author to write music to carry the words of the poem to their fullest potential.

Driven by creativity that swelled within him and inspired him, in a mere 24 days he composed an unheard of 260 page manuscript containing about a quarter of a million musical notes. How did this bypassed musician who had suffered a stroke accomplish this feat of creative expression? He gave himself to the creative nature and talent that God had invested in Him and did the work for the glory of Jesus. Handel himself said this about composing the Hallelujah Chorus in the Messiah, "Whether I was in my body or out of my body as I wrote it, I know not. God knows." That is the creative nature of God at work in a man, through the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of Jesus. His grasp in Jesus did not exceed his reach. And his work, to the glory of Jesus, created a glimpse of the divine.

Dedicate your creative talents and gifts to Jesus and He will give you impossible skills, skills He designed in you. Like Handel, you will be stunned to realize that your creative grasp will never exceed your reach in Jesus. This is a spiritual principle spoken through the prophet Zechariah in the fourth chapter and sixth verse of his book. "*So he answered and said to me: 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts.*"

You have creative talents that you don't realize because you have not yet put your hand to them. Michelangelo was an artist revered for his sculptures. However, Pope Julius commissioned the sculptor to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo viewed himself as a sculptor not a painter. More discouraging to the Florentine artist was that this painting was to be done in fresco. Fresco is not like ordinary painting, it is done on a specific kind of plaster applied to the surface of the area to be painted. Once the plaster was applied, the painting had to be done quickly, before it dried. If the work was not completed by then, the plaster would have to be removed, the work tossed aside and everything would need to be redone. Michelangelo had limited experience with frescos and it normally took years to develop the necessary skills.

So, Michelangelo began a 4 year project on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, doing what he was not skilled to do. He developed new ways to do fresco and changed the way the art was performed. Here is the lesson we learn from this: Michelangelo's weakness became a strength, when he served. From His weakness came arguably the greatest work of art in history. Your weakness becomes strength in Him, when you serve as the occasion demands. When you give expression to the creative ability Jesus has invested in you, the work you do is for His glory. You allow the Holy Spirit to show you things no one else has ever seen or done. Michelangelo gave his talents to the Lord, and he went from being the greatest sculptor to becoming the pre-eminent painter of history. Serve Jesus and He will give you talents and skills you do not now possess.

You are Jesus' Bezalel today. He has designed you with creative gifts that you have not yet even realized. Ask Him what those gifts are. Move out into those gifts in the power of the Holy Spirit. God gave Bezalel these artistic gifts but Bezalel had to step out and put his hand to work. When he did, it was guided and trained by the Holy Spirit. When you put your hand to what He has created in your mind, you get a glimpse into the kingdom of God.

Diego Velazquez had an ability with his art, to truly "see" what he was painting. What makes his art so striking is that you can see the artist was able to perceive the true nature and qualities of the people he portrayed in his art. His greatest work of art is called Las Meninas. In that painting, he did the unique thing of painting himself into the work. You look at the piece as though you are the one who is being painted. On the canvas, you see a scene played out before you, but you also see the artist looking toward you with his paint and easel in hand. Just to his right, you see the back of the canvas he is working on. It is the canvas on which he is painting you. Remarkable!

The more you look at Las Meninas you come to realize that in the very back of his painting is a mirror. It is small and slightly blurred, but by its position you realize that it holds the reflection of the subject of the painting. From your position, looking at the painting, you know that you are the subject of the painting. You realize that the mirror in the back of the room you are looking into holds the reflection of the person who is situated where you are as the viewer of the piece. You are the subject. However, then you ultimately realize that the blurred faces in the mirror are the faces of the king and queen of Spain. This is a royal portrait with the royal family present (in the very center of the painting is one who is clearly the child princess). This is a royal portrait and you are the king or queen.

Velazquez has put us in the place of royalty, which is so very appropriate, because even though I doubt Velazquez intended this meaning, it is very apt. We, who are believers in Jesus, are part of the Royal family. We are part of the family of God. The Bible even tells us that we are a royal priesthood in Jesus according to 1 Peter 2:9, "*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him*

who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;”

The creative work that we do for Jesus will give us a view of Jesus. It will also give others a view of Jesus and the greater realities of the spirit realm. Everything you do, using the creative nature He designed in you, will serve to give you revelation of Jesus. It will help you see Jesus, and it will also serve to accomplish the same thing for others. You will probably never realize the value your created work for Jesus will have to so many others. It will help them see who they can be in Jesus. It will help them see beyond the natural to the supernatural and the eternal things in Jesus.

Having said this, it is also vital to understand that not all art is for public presentation. But all such works do always point to Jesus, His Word and to revelation of Jesus and His Word. The final product of art is not what matters. It is the process, being creative and doing creative acts, that reveals spiritual truths to us. It helps us to see ourselves with spiritual eyes. The more you apply your creative gifts, the more you will see, and the more revelation will come to you.

Art is all things and all efforts that explore His glory through our using the physical world to create that which gives us a glimpse into the beauty of His eternal realm. The act of creation brings fruit and it brings revelation.

Dedicate your creative expressions to Jesus. The Holy Spirit within you empowers you to do beyond what is within your own abilities. But if you use those skills for self and for the senses you will never be satisfied. We learn this lesson from the Genesis account of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:4, 6-9, ⁴*“And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”* ⁶*“And the LORD said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.”* ⁷*Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”* ⁸*So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.* ⁹*Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.”*

The men who built the tower of Babel were the first to pervert the creative nature of God that was within them. They used the creative and artistic gift of architecture to build a tower that honored themselves and not God, as they endeavored to make a name for themselves. The name Babel is the same Hebrew word as Babylon and in the book of Revelation Babylon is exposed as the birthplace of idolatrous worship! It began with man’s pride and the abuse of the creative nature of God within them. It was creativity for the flesh not artistic expression for the glory of God.

God is a creative God, and He has created us in His image, so we have that powerful creative

nature within us. If we will endeavor to give expression of that creativity we will be amazed at what God does through us. How great is the creative ability within you? In Genesis 11:6, God said this, “...*Nothing they purpose to do will be withheld from them*”. The incredible gifts of creativity and imagination and artistic expression that God has invested in you can produce results that will amaze you as they did Handel. He will use your creative expressiveness to bring to the world things that no human eye has seen before. I want no limits on the creative abilities that Jesus has invested in me. What have you imagined doing for Jesus to His glory? Not just in traditional forms of art but in industry of your hands and results of your mind? Don't hold back. Put your hand to the task and allow the power of the Holy Spirit to create and do more than you have ever considered. In Jesus, nothing you purpose to do for His glory will be withheld!

God is a creator. He is creative by nature, and as His highest creation, we display His creative nature. Your life is a work of art for Jesus that only you can complete. All that you put your hand to will give the world a glimpse of the glories of Jesus and of the glory realm of the heavenlies that are ahead of us. Endeavor to experience through the power of the Holy Spirit the art of living for Jesus, as His creative nature is illuminated through you to draw the world to Jesus.