

RELEASING

CREATIVITY

## Welcome

Thanks for downloading the Speakers' Notes for the Worship Central Course.

In this fourth session, we've outlined the structure and key points for the talk, and left space for you to add your own examples. Feel free to personalise the examples and make it your own, but we'd please ask that you keep the core material the same, as we want people to be able to experience the same course wherever they are.

We pray this course will be a great blessing to you and your worship team, and we stand with you as you seek to encounter God, equip the worshipper and empower your local church.

Tim Hughes & Al Gordon

## Introduction

Welcome to the fourth session of the Worship Central Course. In the last session we started to look at the practicalities of leading worship, and this time we're going to explore how we can release creativity in our teams.

### **i. The power of art**

Great art has great power. From a piece of music that moves you to tears, to a painting that captures the imagination, to a film that leaves you speechless, the world is ablaze with explosions of creativity that inspire and captivate us.

At its best, great art even has the power to change us. The Catholic priest and writer, Henri Nouwen, was profoundly impacted by Rembrandt's painting of Jesus' parable 'The Return of the Prodigal Son'. He wrote: 'When I first saw Rembrandt's painting, my intense response to the father's embrace of his son told me that I was desperately searching for that inner place where I too could be held as safely as the young man in the painting.' This one painting became the start of a significant journey of healing for him. It gave him an insight into the Father's love, which left him a changed man.

It's not just visual art that can move us – music also has incredible power to affect us, to shape our hearts and to draw us near to the infinite. We've seen in the past decades how music has defined cultural movements, crossed borders and become the common language of popular culture.

Martin Luther wrote, 'Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. She is a mistress and governess of those human emotions which control men or more often overtake them. Whether you wish to comfort the sad, to subdue frivolity, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate or to appease those full of hate ... what more affective means than music could you find?'

Music allows us to feel and connect with our emotions, to express mysteries and ideas too deep for words.

Music is a fascinating thing: did you know that most toilets flush in the key of E flat? And did you know that, according to research studies, music is proven to have a physical impact: it can help cows produce more milk, and the genre of pop music helps entice chickens to lay more eggs and – as one American research program discovered – can shorten the length of a hospital stay for premature babies by an average of twelve days. Music can change the way we feel.

### **Insert Story**

Tell your own story of a time when you were confronted by the power of music. You may use the story Tim tells below to help you prepare or, if you don't have an example, retell Tim's story.

### **Example story**

*Tim: 'Recently I visited a high security prison in London, where I was involved in leading a workshop for the prisoners on the power of music. With fifty men crowded into a classroom I began to play different pieces of music and asked them what emotions each song evoked in them. The first song I played was 'Song 2' by the British band, Blur – a two-minute long explosion of guitars and raw energy. As the song ended, I asked the men how it made them feel. I began to panic when the biggest guy in the room stood up and said: 'That song makes me feel really aggressive.' Freaking out, I quickly decided to change the mood and put on some Celine Dion to try and calm things down.'*

## **ii. The reason for art**

Why is creativity so important? First and foremost, it is because it is in God's nature to create. The Bible begins with these words ... 'In the beginning God created ...' (Genesis 1:1). He is the great divine Artist. At the sound of his voice creation was spoken into being; the great expanse of water and sky, ocean and land, vegetation, lights in the sky separating day and night, the

seasons, living creatures of every form, and finally humankind, made in God's own image, created to create.

Think for a moment about the intricate design of the human body. The human ear can hear around 300,000 different tones, whilst our eyes can distinguish between 8 million colour differences. The great scientist Isaac Newton said that the human thumb alone was proof enough for him of the existence of God; such is the wonder of its workings. We have been created by a God who is bursting with creativity, wonder and mystery, so it's not surprising that we want to create as a result.

The evidence of his creativity is all around us. All through the Scriptures we see that creation is alive in song. From the morning stars that sing together (Job 38:7), to the mountains and hills bursting into song (Isaiah 55:12). From the seas that lift up their voice (Psalm 93:3) to the rivers clapping their hands (Psalm 98:4–8).

Not only does creation sing, but the Bible tells us that God himself is singing too. The Father is described as rejoicing over us with singing in Zephaniah 3:17. The Son, Jesus, sings his hymn of praise to the Father in Mark 14:26, and in Ephesians, we see the Holy Spirit inspiring us to worship with 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs'. The Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are caught up in an eternal song.

Our creativity is most effective when the Spirit of God is poured out into our lives. Just as the Lord filled Bezalel with his Spirit, allowing him to work with skill in all kinds of crafts (Exodus 31:1–5), so he takes our gifts, multiplies them and makes something profound and wonderful. The more we wait on him, long for his presence and go on being filled with the Spirit, the more we find our souls bursting with creativity.

Creativity comes from – and belongs to – God. And it remains an essential way that we must use to communicate God's love to the world around us. We need to rise up, think big and reach out to use our gifts and creativity for God's glory. It's no use settling for second best or leaving the great stuff to someone else – we all need to bring creativity into our worship.

But how? What practical steps can we take to release creativity? Let's look at four ideas:

## 1. Explore

Great artists, designers, wordsmiths and songwriters are prepared to explore; to inquire, to wonder and question; to devote themselves to the process of creativity. But this exploration by its very nature is time consuming. It is often said that creativity is 10 per cent inspiration and 90 per cent perspiration. In his book *Outliers* Malcolm Gladwell suggests that it takes 10,000 hours of practice and study in order to become exceptional in your field.

We all know how tempting it is to rush the process of creativity. We can be eager to finish off our masterpiece and so cut corners or settle for mediocre results, rather than pushing the boundaries and our personal limits to produce something really special.

In the days after his death, you couldn't move on Twitter or Facebook without coming across a quote from Steve Jobs. As well as being the founder of Apple, he knew a thing or two about creative genius, and it's not surprising that he knew the value of time as well:

He said: 'To design something really well you have to get it. It takes a passionate commitment to thoroughly understand something, chew it up, not just swallow it quickly. Most people don't take the time to do that.'

But what should we be doing with our time? That answer is simple: explore everything. Explore the universe in which we live, whatever part or corner or aspect of it that fascinates you. Explore your very relationship with God and explore the ideas, concepts, miracles and truths that flow as a result. Explore in a way that cherishes bewilderment, astonishment and amazement. Steer away from the stale and head with all your passion towards that which oozes life. Explore everything and be prepared to be filled with wonder ... do this diligently, over many hundreds and thousands of hours, and you'll find yourself at the birthplace of creativity.

## 2. Express

Once we've explored the meanings that surround our basic ideas, we need passionate, heartfelt expression. The Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoyevsky once said, 'Only the heart knows how to find what is precious.'

Creativity must be honest, real and raw. We search for the authentic articulation of our thoughts, feelings, hopes; we unveil our deepest emotions and our yearning for transformation. It was said of the Renaissance artist Fra Angelico (1387–1455) that, 'He would never take up his brushes without prayer. Whenever he painted a crucifixion, the tears would stream down his face and it is no wonder that the faces and attitudes of his figures express the depth and sincerity of his Christian piety.'

In all forms of art there is a danger of trying to create without allowing our hearts to feel. The Celts had a phrase: 'Knowledge is dangerous unless it goes through the heart.' We limit ourselves when we try to communicate what we think others want to hear. The challenge of an artist is to avoid simply following trends, sticking to familiar formulas and patterns, working out of our sensibilities alone. This is not creativity released; it is creativity restricted, and it will never hit the mark. Rather than boxing ourselves in, we have to be confident and express ourselves. The singer Adele talks about 'word vomiting'. Speaking about her hugely successful album *21*, she says, 'I wrote this album to get over a break up, I didn't write it to be like, "this is gonna be a hit." ' In our art at times we need to allow ourselves to express more without over-analysing. Often it's as we communicate emotion from the depths of our heart, we find it connects and resonates with others.

Great creativity comes from a sense of tension between our reality and our longings – the language of the heart. It is the responsibility of the creative community in the church to give voice to the tension that exists between what *is* and what *should be*. Jon Foreman, the lead singer of the American band Switchfoot writes:

'The artist is a bridge between despair and hope. The artist, more than anyone else, is responsible for the re-creation, redefinition and rethinking of the world around us. Every poem, every song, every painting has tremendous possibility.'

If you want examples you only need to look at the Psalms to see how powerfully songs and poems can affect people. Their authenticity and honesty have brought comfort and renewed strength to so many believers, helping to express the inarticulate speech of the heart. They consist of more than mere words written to impress – the Psalms are the out-workings of the joys and struggles of their writers.

We see this so clearly in Psalm 51. David, the great King of Israel has succumbed to his lust and had an affair with the object of his desire, Bathsheba. On discovering her pregnant, he attempts to cover his tracks by having her husband killed in battle. It is only when he is confronted by the prophet Nathan that David is convicted of his actions and sin. Humbled and grieved, he pours out his heart before his Maker in a moving prayer of repentance:

‘Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin ... Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me.’ (Psalm 51:1–2, 10).

David wasn’t trying to write a song on purity because there was a gap in the market. He wrote about purity because his heart demanded it.

The author Sheila Davis, speaking to a group of songwriters commented, ‘A song is successful when an audience responds with a recognition that says, “Me too ... I’ve felt that ... I’ve seen what you’ve seen ... I know what you mean.” That’s what our applause says: the performer is singing not so much to us as for us.’ This kind of creativity can only come from a heart laid bare before God.

### **3. Experiment**

Next, we must have the courage to experiment. We need to force ourselves out of our comfort zones and encourage an attitude of dangerous, risk-taking creativity. Take, for example, the French painter Matisse who was one of the most important artists of the twentieth century. In his seventies and in poor health, Matisse found himself bedridden and unable to paint. One



day, lying there in bed, he started playing with a pair of scissors the nurse had left at his bedside, cutting pieces of coloured paper into shapes. Almost by accident, the paper started to form fascinating images on his lap. He began, with the help of his assistants, to assemble these shapes onto canvases. With what little he had, the great artist had experimented and it led to what many consider to be his most important work, art that is now famous the world over.

New expressions of creativity often cause a stir. Here's what one paper in America had to say about new forms of music in the church:

'There are several reasons for opposing it. One, it's too new. Two, its often worldly, even blasphemous. The new Christian music is not as pleasant as the more established style. Because there are so many new songs, you can't learn them all. It puts too much emphasis on instrumental music rather than godly lyrics. This new music creates disturbances making people act indecently and disorderly. The preceding generation got along without it. It's a money-making scam and some of these new music upstarts are lewd and loose.'

Now you may be thinking this is an attack on contemporary worship, but it is in fact a church leader attacking Isaac Watts, writer of the hymn 'When I survey the wondrous cross' in 1723.

So many of the writers of the classic hymns we enjoy today came under fierce criticism for being radical and offensive. Criticism is part of the creative landscape. New ideas may always ruffle a few feathers but we must never shy away from experimentation.

It was Albert Einstein who said, 'Anyone who has never made a mistake, has never tried anything new.' As creative people we must always embrace new ideas and ways of working. Only then will we stumble across profound and fresh new ideas.

The fourth step is to:

## **4. Evaluate**

Creativity is not only about generating ideas; it involves making judgments and decisions about them. Almost all creative work will invariably need to undergo a rigorous process of editing, developing and tweaking before it can be considered a 'finished work'.

It is important to evaluate every creative idea. Ask yourself probing questions: For a song, is the melody memorable and captivating? For a poem, is the prose original and emotive? For a new design, is it striking and clear?

The French novelist Emile Zola once said, 'The artist is nothing without the gift, but the gift is nothing without the work'.

The danger when creating is that we get so close to our work that we lose perspective. That's why there often comes a point in the evaluation process at which outside input is needed. Collaboration like this is an important part of art; if you think about it, no one ever started a revolution on their own. Proverbs 27:17 reminds us; 'As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.'

One of the greatest feats of creativity in human history is Michelangelo's incredible illustration of the story of the Bible, emblazoned on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The art critic Vasari, a contemporary of Michelangelo's, wrote, 'The whole world came running when the vault was revealed, and the sight of it was enough to reduce them to stunned silence.' With one act of creativity, Michelangelo had restored 'light to a world that for centuries had been plunged into darkness'.

Shortly after work had begun, Michelangelo discovered to his horror that whole sections of freshly painted ceiling were disappearing in clouds of mould caused by the wet plaster beneath. Entire sections were lost and the great man was inconsolable. The day was saved by a little known assistant – Jacopo L'Indaco – who found a new, mould-proof way of laying the plaster. It was his contribution that ensured the work lasted for generations.

So, while Michelangelo is credited as the artist, the truth is that he would have been nothing without a team around him, mixing the paint, plastering, even painting some sections of the

ceiling under his guidance. If we are to see creativity released in our churches, we must learn to collaborate, to champion each other's ideas and to give each other space and permission to innovate.

How great would it be if every local church became a cathedral of creativity, producing incredible new art for the glory of God? How wonderful would it be if we were producing art that reflected the work of the Holy Spirit among us in creative ways that stopped people in their tracks? How good would it be to return to the days when people flocked into the church just because they wanted to glimpse something of God's glory reflected in our creativity?

If we want to get there, then the challenge is set before us. God's already proved that he is the master creator, the ultimate in expression: the question needs to be asked of us – will we explore without limit? Will we allow our hearts to feel enough pain and joy to be able to express what they discover? Will we be brave enough to truly experiment? And will we commit to the hard work needed to truly evaluate that which we create? And when all's done, will we give all the glory back to the one who is the source of everything?

## **Conclusion**

The Baroque composers J.S. Bach and George Handel were both born in 1685. They were the leading musical lights of their age. To this day they are both regarded among the greatest geniuses in the history of music.

Amazingly, these two great composers never met, yet they shared a common practice. Early on, they both decided to make the worship of Jesus central in their own life and work. Their music was soaked with a sense of God's power and presence. And written on each of their scores, were three simple letters, S. D. G. Short for *Soli Deo Gloria* this means 'Glory to God alone'. Towering geniuses of creativity united in their pursuit of the glory of God.

If we want worship to be truly central, will we let that be our motto as we ask God to release his creativity in our midst? There is no limit to what God can do through us – through our creativity, our lives, our sacrifices – if we do this one thing: make worship central.

## **Prayer**

Lord, Thank you for the amazing gift of creativity. We thank you that you are the Creator and that creating is your business. Father, we pray that you would come now and fill us, just like you filled Bezalel, with your Holy Spirit. And we thank you that yours is the Glory – Glory to God alone – in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Next**

After a time of prayer ministry, move into discussion groups and explore the questions on the notes.

Scripture quotations taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.

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