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# GOD *the* ARTIST

## MADE IN HIS IMAGE

“Daddy, draw me a horse.”

So begins a typical scene in my home. One of my twin daughters, Rachel or Paige, will appear beside me with a colored marker pen and a sheet of paper, and ask me to become Artist Daddy. Most of the time, it’s not difficult. Horses, stars, dogs, cats, and flowers are typical requests from six-year-old girls, and they measure the quality of my work not by its realism, but by whether or not the characters are smiling. In a former life, I was a cartoonist for my college newspaper. So I accept the challenge. I take the pen from her delicate fingers, smooth out her crumpled paper, and draw.

The result is part caricature, part cave drawing, but she is delighted nonetheless. “Thanks, Daddy,” she will offer politely. And then she will muse, “Her name is . . . um . . . Buttercup.” And then she will color it and add green grass, a yellow sun in the corner, and eyelashes (because this is how little girls distinguish girl horsies from boy horsies).

This, to me, is a picture of the first chapter of Genesis. God the Father is also God the Creator. It is not just what He does; it is more

precisely who He is. It is not a gig for Him; it is inherent in His very nature. And because He is the Creator, the Artist God, He must stretch the canvas of infinite emptiness around Him, and wish for more. Then, from the eternal imagination that is His nature, He begins to paint: galaxies, nebulae, capacious, dynamic kaleidoscopes of light and energy and mass, churning and coagulating at His fingertips. Mass yields to gravity, atoms become molecules, stars begin their intricate dance. Cosmos comes from chaos. And by His very will, the

Artist God paints the universe we know and understand and live in.

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Then He stands back. He puts down His palette, cleans His brush, examines the easel. He smells the wet acrylic, feels the interplay of colors on

the canvas. He takes it all in, and then He slowly smiles. And then He calls it “good.”

But He is not done yet. He calls on His creation, that which is humanity, that which is privileged to experience the wonder of it all, and invites him to participate in this creation. Abba God calls Adam to His side, and then gives him a job to do: to name the animals. And in so doing, He calls us to be creative ourselves. The created becomes creator, the art becomes artist. We are invited into the mystery of His inborn aesthetic.

Genesis says that we are made in His image. This is more profound than we know. We are made with intellects, with the amazing capacity to understand and ponder and offer explanations about the world around us. We have sentience, the awareness of our own being and a consciousness of the universe. We have the ability to build machines, create cities, form entire civilizations, and then destroy them. We can philosophize, moralize, theorize, and know good and evil.

And we are made not just as physical beings, but as spiritual beings as well. We are made with a capacity to love as He loved. To have free will, as He has free will. To choose the course of our own lives. And also, to create as He creates. To express ourselves in artistic and imaginative ways. In short, we are artists because He is an artist.

Thus, as artists, we are endowed with both the ability and the desire to create, and the ability to derive pleasure from it. We create because we are made in the image of the Creator. We simply cannot help it. This is why Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel. This is why Homer told his stories. This is why Shakespeare penned his dramas. This is why David played the ten-string lyre. This is why children draw and play-act and imagine.

That is who we are: artists. Children of the Creator. We grasp at sunsets and attempt to paint them. We hear the sound of the ocean and compose sonnets in its honor. We see the autumn swans dance, and we dance. And we draw horses named Buttercup.

## DISCOVERING THE PASSION

When I was a little boy, more than anything else in the world, I wanted to be a concert pianist. Of course, more than anything else in the world, I wanted to be a police officer and an astronaut and Spider-Man. Still, my mind was consumed in a fascination for classical music. Chopin, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schroeder were my idols. Liberace was my antichrist. And by the age of thirteen, Bach had become my hero.

My parents tell me that I first began to take lessons when I was almost five. My first piano teacher was a little old prunelike lady named Mrs. Branoni. I would extrapolate ten-second minuets like “Putt Putt the Speed Boat” for her as we sat perched on the piano bench, my legs dangling, her toes keeping time. Occasionally, she would nod off, only

to be awakened when I asked her a question. And if I played well, she would stick a silver or gold star on the page. I liked that a lot.

From that time until I was fourteen, I banged away on an oversized, out-of-tune mahogany upright, putt-putting through a dozen piano teachers along the way. I loved that piano, loved the sound that it made, loved the control I had of it, loved the security of being behind it. In good ways and in bad, it became a part of my identity.

I played my piano noncommittally, never putting a lot of thought or effort into it, never needing to. From the time I can remember, I'd always had this magical ability to play almost anything on the piano that I could hum. Seriously, I thought I had composed "Heart and Soul" when I was six.

Then came Professor Krauss. Professor Krauss was a stocky German with square features and big, burly hands that played with mesmerizing authority and exactitude. He was a passionate man, passionate about this thing called music. And the passion was contagious.

Twice a month, he drove his Mercedes diesel from Carmel Valley to my home on the poor side of Salinas to teach this short, fat, twelve-year-old Filipino kid with glasses. He challenged me, opened my mind, opened my heart. There was something inside me that awoke during that time, something that helped me transcend the ordinariness of my life. Without knowing it, Professor Krauss changed my life.

One day, he brought me a skinny yellow book filled with *lots* and *lots* of notes. They were called "Inventions" and they were written by a guy named Johann, which I thought was oddly cool. Bach was a different kind of guy. There was something about him, not just the precision of his work, but the emotion that lay within it. It was only later that I discovered that the passion of his music came from his faith. Johann Sebastian Bach—artist, composer, keyboard innovator, definer

of his genre—was first and foremost a worshiper of the Living God. Everything he did was for God’s honor, and not his own: “The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul.” One day I hope to meet him in heaven. Maybe take a lesson or two.

Under the tutelage of Professor Krauss, I learned discipline and control, dexterity and nuance. I learned the craft. And I caught the passion. Two years later, he had to leave, but not without a last word: “Keep pragtizing your finger egzercises, yah? Like dis, yah?” And I do. To this day.

That was three decades ago. Since then, I have moved on from my puppy-dog love affair with classical music. There was rock and roll—naive and exciting like a teenage crush—which my brothers and I discovered on the AM band of the living room stereo. Then came jazz—like the bad girl who flirts with you when you’re on a date—and I learned that the rules of music were made to be broken. I have played pop, soul, country, blues, Dixieland, big band, reggae, R&B, church music, smooth jazz, and trash rock and roll. I’ve played in cover bands, coffeehouse groups, marching bands, symphonic bands, fusion bands, and garage bands. And whatever the style, the passion remains.

I have come to realize that this passion is more than just a hobby. I believe it was put inside of me from the moment I was born. It was in me when I climbed on a piano bench for the first time. It was in me when I took clarinet lessons. It was in me when I played my first solo, wrote my first song, recorded my first demo, formed my first band, produced my first album, first sang a song in the shower. It is in me today. Because I don’t just *play* music; I am a musician. I don’t *do* art; I am an artist. More than just what I do, it is who I am. That is who God made me to be.

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my

mother's womb. . . . My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:13, 15–16).

This is the way for everyone, I believe. We are all artists, fashioned by the Artist, to create, reveal, and interpret the world. Some of us have more skill or talent or ability than others. But all of us have this innate artistic predisposition within us, placed there by the Creator. Some of us have just never found the passion. And that is a shame.

I didn't become a cop. I didn't work for NASA. I wasn't bitten by a radioactive spider. But I do believe that God made me with a passion for music. And I must be true to that.

### THE ARTIST INCARNATE

Someone asked me once if Jesus Christ had been an artist. "Good question," I replied.

We talked about the vocation of His stepfather, Joseph of Nazareth, who was not only "a righteous man" (Matthew 1:19), but also a carpenter, a craftsman of wood. The carpenter, rather than today's modern notion of the carpenter as house builder, was more so a craftsman, a skilled artisan. Not so much a hammerer of nails, but more a shaper of wood. It was an artistic craft that took many years of training to master.

We talked about how it is the Jewish custom (as in many pre-modern cultures) to pass on one's skills to the sons, and how the natural implications of that custom would have impacted this firstborn son. It would have been the responsibility of Joseph to pass on the skills of the trade to Jesus, in order that his son would have a vocation and a future. So although nothing is said of Joseph's relationship with

his stepson, one would assume that Jesus knew the craft from an early age and that it was the vocational context upon which He saw life.

We talked about a wonderful quote I read once in Madeleine L'Engle's book *Walking on Water*, which read: "Jesus was not a theologian. He was God who told stories."<sup>1</sup> That is not to say that Jesus was not wise nor learned, as evidenced in the account of Luke, for he says of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple, "Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:47). But He was not a theoretician, one who systematizes and extrapolates and publishes. Instead, He told parables, Truth so practical and real and profound that it confounded the Pharisees and delighted the crowds and cut to the very essence of being.

The Lost Coin. The Prodigal Son. The House on the Sand. The Mustard Seed. The Sower. The Pearl of Great Price. The Plank in Your Eye. The Lilies of the Field. The Lost Sheep. The Bread Which Was His Body. The Wine Which Was His Blood.

Jesus was speaking of unfathomable mysteries. And the words we have invented to unravel these mysteries—words like propitiation, incarnation, atonement, ecclesiology, grace—are simply too small and inadequate to fully describe and explain the truth. And maybe our brains are just a little too small to fully understand them anyway. So when He spoke, it was necessary to use the *art* of words—metaphors and similes and parables—to more adequately express the depth of truth that is the cosmic drama. As if this mortal life we live were simply a metaphor for some larger eternal life He invites us to.

Jesus was a master of the parable, the simile, the metaphor. He spoke Truth wrapped in the art of storytelling. The eternal Word, speaking the Truth of the Word, with the art of words.

And we talked about John's poetic extension of Genesis 1, a revelation of the person of Jesus, which is found in his first chapter: "In the

beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:1–3; see also Colossians 1:15–17 and 1 Corinthians 8:6). Jesus is eternal, one in essence with the Eternal Father and Eternal Spirit. Jesus was not only present in the act of creation, but the act of creation happened *through Him*.

BEING AN ARTIST IS NOT  
JUST ABOUT WHAT YOU DO,  
BUT ALSO HOW YOU LIVE  
YOUR LIFE.

This is so deep as to be astounding. The creative muse of the Trinity mysteriously and inexplicably poured through the Person of the pre-incarnate Son. Was it Jesus who said, “The sun shall be yellow” and “the sky shall be blue”? Did

He give peanut butter its taste, and the hummingbird its flight? Was He the inventor of the dimensions, of length and breadth and height and time? Was He the creator of the sun and moon and planets, and the choreographer of their cosmic spirographic dance?

And finally, He was God in the flesh. He was the Incarnation, the fleshing out of Deity. He was the human personification and embodiment of God Himself. In the act of incarnation, through birth and life and death and resurrection, He indwelled that which He Himself created. So He was the Artist who was literally present within His Art.

Was Jesus an Artist? I believe He was. But not only by vocation. Maybe by Inspiration. He lived His entire life—His relationships, His ministry, His calling—as an art. He lived and loved deeply and with passion. He lived from the heart. I’d like to believe that He was an artist, manifesting this descriptor physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Because being an artist is not just about what you do, but also how you live your life.

## LEARNING TO LIVE IN THE MYSTERY

One of the Christmastime traditions my wife and I established with our children when they were young was looking at the Christmas lights around our community. Bundled up under blankets in our minivan (the twenty-first-century version of the horse-drawn sleigh), the entire family would go driving down one street and up another, looking at all the decorated houses in our neighborhood.

And people would go all out. Life-sized reindeer. Nativity scenes. Santas coming down chimneys. Snowmen with top hats and pipes. Candy canes lining people's driveways. And lights. Lots and lots of lights. The more the lights, the more we'd "ooh" and "aah." Then we'd drive back to our house and have hot cocoa.

It was in their third Christmas that my twins, Rachel and Paige, were old enough to really appreciate the event.

And that they did. Through their little three-year-old eyes, our neighborhood was a magical and amazing place. Every house glowed like fresh-baked gingerbread. Trees glistened like the moonlight on fresh-fallen snow. And everywhere there were lights, Rachel and Paige announced excitedly, "Ommagosh, it's bootiful."

It was extremely entertaining listening to them. They must have said it two hundred times. And every time they made this startling declaration, they really, really meant it. "Ommagosh, it's bootiful." "Ommagosh, it's bootiful." "Ommagosh! It's bootiful!!!" I never got tired of hearing them say it. It was as if each street was a new adventure in awe and wonder.

I think we've forgotten what real awe is. Our high-tech, computer-generated, virtual-reality, angst-ridden, dysfunctional world has taken

KIDS DON'T LOOK UP AT  
THE CLOUDS ANYMORE  
AND IMAGINE BUNNIES  
AND MINNOWS.

much of the mystery and wonder out of life. Kids don't look up at the clouds anymore and imagine bunnies and minnows; after all, they studied precipitation in third grade. They don't take much time imagining dinosaurs; there are any number of movies out there that have imagined them for us already. Science—which teaches theory as fact and conjecture as theory—has erased all of the mysteries. Just ask any kid and he'll tell you: the very mysteries of the universe are carefully and regularly explained in half-hour segments on the Discovery Channel.

My sons aren't nearly as impressed by the sight of a rainbow as I used to be when I was their age. Or as I am still.

Things I used to be in awe of when I was a little kid: Purple mountains. Big telescopes. Airplanes. Thunder. Pretty girls. Lighthouses. Big bass drums. Red fire trucks. Stoplights. Crossword puzzles. Our first color television. Walking on the moon. Snow. The doctor's office. Policemen. Sousaphones. The pyramids. Rockets. Big cities. The redwoods. The stars on a cloudless night sky.

Things I used to think were mysterious: The Teacher's Lounge. Solar eclipses. Driving a car. The ocean. The adult section of the public library. Sharks. My big brother's View Master slide viewer. Electricity. Slide rules. Dinosaurs. Ships in bottles. Car engines.

Make up your own list. Then ask your child to make up one. You'll see what I mean. There is a reason why the song "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" is a toddler favorite. Because wrapped up in six short lines is the awe and wonder of the universe.

I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church. And although I am a little more aligned with evangelicalism now, I have great respect for and warm recollections of my Catholic heritage. There was something about being in my church as a child. Sitting in the pew, being painted by the colored beams of light streaming through the stained glass.

Watching the rows of lit candles dance. Kneeling on the cold white marble as I took Communion, the kinesthetic symbolism of that white wafer melting on my tongue. These were powerful moments for me as a child, moments when I understood God in a visceral, unspeakable way. Somehow that seems lacking in the stripped-down modern Christian tradition often experienced today. There is a lack of mystery, a lack of beauty, a lack of something, as if I were watching TV with the sound off, or eating a steak with a stuffy nose. The language of visual art and beauty are missing, or at least somewhat askew.

I remember there was a life-sized crucifix that hung center stage, high above the altar. A statue of Jesus hung on that enormous cross. Eyes closed, His lean body limp and worn, a crown of thorns on His head, the pain and suffering and love pouring from His face, the statue was a longtime fixture in that church. And as such, it went largely ignored by the congregation. But it was there at the front of the church, upon marble steps, that I would kneel and stare up at this statue. And be in awe.

There in my little place, I would ponder God and the mystery of His grace. I would feel it, imagine it, sense it. As I saw the nails in His hands, I could almost hear the sound of the hammer. As I reflected on the crown of thorns, I could imagine the whips on His back. I pictured Jesus, placing Himself on the cross, opening His hands to accept the nails, fulfilling the promise. It was very surreal. And there was a real spiritual mystery to it too, that God the Son would do such a thing. How did He become man? Why would He choose to die like that? When will He return?

I remember I would pray, and my little prayers would just naturally stop, as my eyes continued to be drawn upward, to be in awe at the sight of Jesus on that cross.

Now I don't bring this up in order to entertain a theological

debate about statues and icons. But I think there is a truth here, and it is this: We humans were created to grapple with the mysteries of the universe, and to be in awe and wonder at the sight of them. There are places in our heart for feelings like this. We need to feel them, imagine them, sense them. About God. About His creation. Because the sense of awe is inherent to the act of worship.

The uniquely inventive C. S. Lewis is one of the most influential Christian writers of the twentieth century. Penning such apologetic classics as *The Problem of Pain* and *Mere Christianity*, he is most known for the seven children's books that comprise *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a series that has been translated into more than thirty languages and has sold more than 85 million copies. Author, Oxford scholar, radio personality, Lewis was broadly read, broadly written, and broadly lived.

In the book *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis*, writer and literature scholar Alan Jacobs contends that the key to Lewis was his willingness to “be delighted to the point of self-abandonment.” In spite of his intellect and position, in spite of the tragedies and challenges he faced, he chose to live with the faith and eyes of a child. Jacobs writes:

*I want to suggest that Lewis's willingness to be enchanted held together the various strands of his life: his delight in laughter, his willingness to accept a world made by a good and loving God, and his willingness to submit to the charms of a wonderful story. What is “secretly present in what he said about anything” is an openness to delight, to the sense that there's more to the world than meets the jaundiced eye, to the possibility that anything could happen to someone who's ready to meet anything. For someone with eyes to see and the courage to explore, even an old wardrobe full of musty coats could become the doorway to another world.<sup>2</sup>*

Lewis understood the ultimate triumph of childlike wonder in a world created and controlled and sustained by a benevolent, almighty Father. For it is true that our world is enchanted and supernatural and brimming with Godness. Like Lewis, we need to put away our jaded glasses, our sour dispositions, our worldly pessimisms, and put ourselves in places where we can genuinely say, “Ommagosh, it’s bootiful.”

We need to find the place in our hearts where we can be in awe. Because it fills our souls. It gives us hope. It reminds us of our place in the world. And it’s good practice. For those of us who declare that heaven is our real home, awe and wonder and mystery will be a regular part of life.

Things I am in awe of now: The stars. Art and music. The ocean. God’s grace.

## MUSIC THEORY 101

In a previous life, I was a rocket scientist. Actually, I was a rocket engineer for ten years. I have a bachelor of science degree in aeronautical engineering from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and during that time, I spent two years working for the Air Force at Edwards Air Force Base, running computer models of rocket plumes. After I graduated, I moved to the Sacramento, California, area, and spent eight years working for an aerospace company as a rocket engineer for advanced concepts and as a program manager.

So whenever someone says, “It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to play rock and roll,” I smile.

Now the reason why I reveal this part of myself is because I have a theory. A pseudo-scientific theory. And it goes like this.

No one will argue that there is something about music that can profoundly and mysteriously move people—emotionally and spiritually. There is great beauty in the symphony, there is emotion in the

aria, there is fire in the rock 'n' roll anthem, there is a God-breathed anointing in a hymn like "Amazing Grace."

But if you think about it, the physics of music is startling. *Sound* is the perception of minute gradations of pressure in the air, of energized air molecules traveling in waves. These waves enter your ears, vibrate the organs in your inner ear, and turn into electrical impulses that are interpreted by your brain as sound. *Pitch* is perceived by the frequency of the wave. *Timbre* is the complexity of the wave. (The mathematician Fourier actually discovered that any sound wave can be modeled by the addition of various sine waves alone . . . wild!) This is why we know the difference in sound quality between a trumpet and a clarinet, even if they play the same note. *Harmony* is perceived because we implicitly understand the intervals between frequencies. For example, the top note of an octave is exactly twice the frequency the bottom note. Concert pitch is often defined by setting the "A" note above "middle C" to 440 hertz, or vibrations of sound waves per second. The "A" above that is exactly 880 hertz, and the "A" below is exactly 220 hertz, and so on. And our human bodies are able to perceive the difference, even to less than a single hertz. *Rhythm* is the time intervals between sound waves. And music is the perception of pitch, timbre, melody, harmony, and rhythm all together.

We hear these changes in pitch, timbre, melody, harmony, and rhythm—and it makes us tap our toes, hum along, bop our heads up and down, even laugh and cry and get goose bumps. Such is the power and beauty of this phenomenon called music.

Consider the intentionality that God must have had in the creation of music. He created the atmosphere at sea level with a particular density to carry sound waves. (Contrary to the hundreds of science-fiction movies, there is no sound in outer space.) He created the means upon which objects can vibrate, like the double reed of an oboe or the

stretched goatskin of a djembe or the vocal cords of a soprano or the catgut of a violin bow rubbing the strings. He created the human ear, an incredibly complex and intricate human subsystem for perceiving that sound. He created a capacity within the human brain to register these sound waves and turn them into electrical impulses and distinguish and organize sounds, an amazing feat unto itself.

MY THEORY IS THIS:  
GOD LOVES MUSIC.

And then the most amazing thing of all: He created an inborn aesthetic within man that allows us to be moved by the beauty of form that comes from harmonic and rhythmic proportion. We hear music, and we feel sadness or joy, calmness or intensity, inspiration or transcendence.

I truly believe that those who look at the complexity of such things and do not see the intentionality behind it are simply fooling themselves. Thomas Dubay, in his book *The Evidential Power of Beauty*, states:

*Computers cannot be constructed by random particles flying about for billions of years. The complete works of William Shakespeare, nicely printed and produced in a handsome volume, did not result from a gigantic explosion in a cosmic print shop eons ago. Winds and rains and dust blowing over and upon a large piece of marble did not bring the Pieta<sup>3</sup> into being. No normal person has the least doubt about these three statements. People know that chance can explain neither beauty nor intricate complexity.<sup>4</sup>*

Now consider this. The book of Revelation describes music in heaven. People and heavenly beings singing praises to God. Music wondrous and beautiful and awe-filled beyond our wildest imaginings. God's intentionality of music extends to the supernatural places, toward heaven itself.

My theory is this: God loves music. He is passionate about it. He is the original audiophile. And more so, it is one of His love languages. He is moved by it. He is delighted by it. He derives great joy when we express ourselves to Him with music. He inspires us to sing, and we sing. He inspires us to compose and play, and we compose and we play. And He inspires us, in part because He simply loves to hear us play, loves to hear us compose, loves to hear us sing.

Do we as musicians truly understand this? Do we truly fathom this revelation? We musicians were created, in part, to play the gig to end all gigs. We have the privilege and honor of playing and singing for the God of the universe. And when we play and sing and worship, He taps His foot to the beat. He smiles at the clever turn of the phrase. He anticipates the key change, hangs on every note in the solo, leans forward in His seat when we hit the final chorus. He applauds when we finish each song. And we must never take that privilege lightly.

### SEARCHING FOR TRANSCENDENCE

My freshman year in college, I went on tour with the Cal Poly Symphonic Band to Southern California. It was a big deal, because our tour culminated in a trip to Disneyland where we would play an afternoon concert in the Carnation Garden. In addition to being second-chair clarinet, I played in the Dixieland band (one of the skeletons in my closet), so I was pretty tired by the time we got to the Disneyland parking lot.

But we didn't enter the public entrance. Instead, we took a service entrance and found ourselves in a part of Disneyland I had never seen before. Hidden behind the well-manicured hedges and Park Employees Only signs, we found a back lot full of rusting Dumbo cars and broken carousel horses and other faded Disney-phenalia. It was

drab, junky, unsettling, fallen, like we had crossed into Disney Hades. It was *not* a magical place.

Quickly we got off the bus, dressed, assembled, and tuned up. Then we were led by some costumed hostesses through a maze of halls and doorways. And as I pushed my way through a hidden gate in the wall, I suddenly found myself in a beautiful garden with happy faces, beautiful scenery, and children with balloons. This was the Disneyland we knew and loved. So we took our places under the gazebo and after checking concert pitch, launched into a couple of well-prepared songs.

All was going well . . . until Mickey showed up.

Mickey Mouse, saucer ears wiggling, walked smack dab into the middle of our concert and started mugging for the crowd. It was amusing at first, but quickly became annoying. And he wouldn't go away. Our flustered conductor, not knowing what to do, started mugging with him. In the midst of this indiscretion, he offered the conductor's baton to Mickey. *Oh no*, I thought to myself. *Oh, no, no, no, no.*

Mickey quickly snatched the baton. Mickey jumped onto the conductor's platform. Mickey raised his arms. And we—like dogs responding to Pavlov's bell—automatically raised our instruments to our lips.

It was like that scary scene from *Fantasia*, and we were already neck-deep in the water.

Then Mickey gave the downbeat. And the most magical thing happened. The entire band, over seventy of us, began to play the Mickey Mouse theme. In the same key. At the same time. In the same tempo. With woodwind flourishes and cymbal crashes and brass syncopation. A song we had never played, never rehearsed, never even had sheet music for.

“Hey there, hi there, ho there, we're as happy as can be. M-I-C-K-E-Y! M-O-U-S-E!”

We ended with a sting, then quickly pulled our instruments down onto our laps. And we looked at one another with shocked, puzzled looks on our faces, as if to ask, “Did that just happen?” Amidst the cheering, Mickey politely handed the baton back to our conductor, who was just as flabbergasted as we were. Then Mickey waved his big four-fingered gloves at the crowd, pulled on his suspenders, and disappeared with his entourage.

To this day, I have no explanation for what happened. I don’t even remember the rest of the concert. But I will remember that moment for the rest of my life.

I believe the power of art lies in its transcendence. In the act of art, there is a mysterious, unquantifiable convergence between this world and the next. We feel it when we allow the silence of an oil painting to touch us. We feel it when we allow ourselves to be immersed in a symphonic performance. We feel it when we are pulled into a compelling movie. It’s the same feeling when we grasp the beauty of a sunset or the power of the ocean or the awe of a shooting star.

For there is something deep within us that belongs more to the eternal than the temporal. Our soul longs for the supernatural, the spiritual, the things of heaven. And art is a language of the soul, allowing us to express that longing and pull back the curtain of the eternal window.

Jeremy Begbie asserts in his book *Voicing Creation’s Praise*:

*I can see no compelling reason why the arts should not be approached from this perspective, or, to be more specific, why we should construe art as constantly moving us beyond this material world to some “higher” realm, or see the heart of an artist’s work as giving outward expression to inner, non-material realities, as if the “real” work was*

*carried out in the sanctuary of the self, and the piece of art merely served to externalize and convey this inner experience.<sup>5</sup>*

We are moved by art, because the beauty of art reflects a Divine aesthetic placed deep within all of us, sinners and saints alike. It is still another aspect of His revelation, a part of the fingerprint He has left upon us, His mortal sculptures. And when that aesthetic is tapped, we feel it. For some of us with heightened artistic awareness, it is deeper than for others. But it is there just the same.

The Holy Spirit is alive and well, moving around us, and for some, within us. He prompts, moves, waits, reveals.<sup>6</sup> And in that revelation, we transcend our earthly lives and visit the eternal.

I feel this often when I lead my church in worship. We gather together as church leaders and produce our agendas, our programs, our plans. We set up and prepare and rehearse the band, the technical details, the choir, the drama team. And then somewhere down the line, God shows up and surprises us in the most unusual ways. Sometimes it is in planning. Sometimes it is in worship. Sometimes it is in the private worship before worship. But He keeps showing up, again and again and again. And for some strange reason, when He does, I am always somehow surprised.

In the art of worship, as in the art of life, and as in the art of art, we expect and experience transcendence. For art is a magical thing. But we have such a surprising and awe-filled God, that when He shows up, we are still blown away.

## REFRIGERATOR ART

I am an art collector. But not in the pretentious “hang it in the living room to impress” kind of way. I keep my art at the bottom of my top dresser drawer in the bedroom. I’ve been collecting this art off and on

now for about fifteen years, ever since my firstborn son could pick up a crayon. And four children later, I think I've amassed a pretty good collection.

You know what I'm talking about. This is the art of discovery, the art of innocence, the art of perpetual hope. Pictures of frilly hearts and horsies, stick figures of Mommy and Daddy, superheroes, and things somewhat indescribable. Imaginings of a universe where it's okay to color outside the lines, where it's okay for dogs to be green and sometimes have more than two ears.

Each picture has taken its turn hanging in my office or on the refrigerator door, to be acknowledged and appreciated, to be the fine-motor skills exercise of little fingers, to be the soul expression of a little heart.

And there is something alive about these pictures. Alive because the artist becomes alive in the creation, like a storyteller whose voice

**HE TAKES WHAT WE CREATE  
AND HANGS IT ON HIS  
REFRIGERATOR DOOR.**

rises as she reaches the climax of her story, or a rose whose time comes to bloom. My sons and daughters have taken their turns making their imaginations come alive, turning blank pieces

of paper into colored landscapes alive in their minds.

Sure, my collection won't hang in the Louvre. But they are precious works of art to me nonetheless. Because they were created for me, with love and care and childlike craftsmanship. They reflect the hand of the artist and the vision of his mind's eye. My love for this art is a reflection for my love for the artists, who are my children.

I think God is like that. For God is our Father, our Abba, our Intimate God, and we are His children, his beloved. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1).

For He sees our compositions, our choreography, our creations, those expressions that come from our souls, created from our hands, works from which He is the ultimate inspiration. And the Master Artist smiles at the creation of His creation. He genuinely takes pleasure in the work of our craft. He takes what we create and hangs it on His refrigerator door.

By definition, we all have artists in us, because we all see the world in our own special and distinct ways, and are able to express this view uniquely. Each of us sees the sunset differently. Each of us feels sadness differently. Each of us sees the color red differently. The smell of bacon and eggs in the morning is a distinctly different experience for each of us, because we each bring our own senses, preferences, physicalities, and memories to the breakfast table. This is true for every experience we encounter in life.

WE ARE ALL BORN ARTISTS,  
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The way you feel on a windy autumn-leaves afternoon, or when you sit at the beach and watch the ocean, or when you hear a baby laugh—all point to the artist that resides in you. The term is not reserved for the select few. For we all have been given the eyes and ears and hands and the souls of artists. And this is what makes this profound to me: that is how God made us.

But there is something terribly wrong with what we do with this Truth. You see, we grow up. And we learn that we are not artists, not really, for the term “artist” is something reserved for museums or people who produce albums. Somewhere in our journey, we learn that our art is somehow not good enough, and we put down the crayons and the paintbrushes, not wanting to embarrass ourselves. Or we learn that to be an “artist” is not to be a man, or to be responsible, or to be

financially prudent, or some other label associated with the word, the concept. We put that label away. Madeleine L'Engle asserts that "only the most mature of us are able to be childlike."<sup>7</sup> We are all born artists, but in the act of living, the artist in many of us dies. And that is a shame.

It is like the little girl who asked her father what he did during the day, and he, being an art instructor, told her he taught people how to draw. "You mean, people forget?" was her honest reply.

I have met many people like this. People who are dying inside, dying to express something that comes from a place deep within, but have no way to express it. We die these little deaths, those of us who stopped taking piano lessons as a child, stopped doodling in the margins of our school papers, hung up their ballet shoes at an early age.

I have a friend who is a rocket engineer. But when no one is looking, he takes out his pastels and paints beautiful outdoor scenes and still art. I encouraged him once to display some of his pieces for an upcoming art gallery at our church. So he showed me a painting of a flower and then confided in me half-jokingly, "Don't tell the guys, okay?"

I get to know these people, those who are trying to find the artist inside of them, and I see their internal passion. They might not even be able to articulate this gnawing at their soul, but it is there just the same. And I have encouraged them—to find their voice, find their gift. And use it.

One person was a frustrated writer, but never really saw it as a gift until she was encouraged to stretch herself. Now she writes tremendously moving and insightful drama sketches and narratives. Another was a computer guy, a left-brained technical person who found out that he could be an artist in the theatrical arts. He learned to express himself through sound and lighting and video. Another

person began taking a digital photography class, and the entire world opened up to her, for she saw the world in a whole different way than everyone else, but could never explain why or how. Now she can show to everyone the world that she sees, through the camera's eye.

If you ask any of these people, you discover that this is much more than finding a hobby. There is a connection to the soul in their art. And for each of these people I know, that connection is a vertical one.

I believe there is more to this than we even know. For God invites us—all of us, not just the privileged few—to meet Him in these places. He stirs us up and calls upon the artistic soul that is in every man and woman and child. He takes our crayon art, the creation of His creation, and holds it up to the light, and takes out His magnets, and hangs it on His refrigerator door.

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