

RELEASING

CREATIVITY

Welcome

Thanks for downloading the Speaker Notes for the Worship Central Course.

In this fourth session, we've outlined the structure and key points for the talk, and left room for you to add your own examples. Feel free to personalize 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 get 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 team.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of creativity, for the blessing it is to us. We pray you would come and speak to us now, stir up in us a vision for what could be, a vision for how we could release creativity. In Jesus' name.

The Power of Art

Great art has great power. From a piece of music that overwhelms and moves you to tears, to a painting that fascinates the mind and imagination, to a film that evokes a response and emotion so powerful that it leaves you speechless, the world is ablaze with explosions of creativity that inspire and captivate us. Whether it be through the visual arts, literature, film, architecture, dance, poetry, painting or sculpture, great art sets our hearts on something higher than ourselves.

At its best, great art even has the power to change us. The Catholic priest and writer, Henry Nouwen, was profoundly impacted by Rembrandt's painting of Jesus' parable 'The Return of the Prodigal Son'. 'When I first saw Rembrandt's painting,' wrote Nouwen, '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 the priest. It gave him an insight into the Father’s love, which left him a changed man - who went on to spend much of his life caring for people with learning disabilities.

It’s not just visual art that can move us - music has incredible power to affect us, shape our hearts and draw us near to the infinite; it is a glorious and wonderful gift that has the power to transform. 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 of 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, entice chickens to lay more eggs and - as one American research program discovered - shorten the length of hospital stay for a premature baby by an average of twelve days. Music can change the way we feel.

[Insert Illustration]

Tim Hughes tells this story ‘Recently I visited a high security prison in London, where I was involved 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 it made him feel "really aggressive." Checking that I had a clear and easy exit to the door I decided to change the mood and put on some Celine Dion.' Tell your own story of a time when you were confronted by the power of music - or retell Tim's if you like.

Created to Create

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 very start of his creation of the world he formed the heavens and the earth and saw that what he had made was good. At the sound of his voice creation was spoken into being; the great expanse of water and sky, ocean and land, vegetation bearing fruit of various kind, lights in the sky separating night and day, the seasons, living creatures of every form, and finally mankind, made in God's own image, created to create. Why is creativity important? Because it is the first thing that God chooses to reveal to us about himself - and he's kept it in the family.

Think 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 no wonder we want to create as a result.

London's St Paul's Cathedral is an architectural wonder. For two hundred and fifty years it was the tallest building in the city, and its dome remains one of the highest in the world. But search throughout the Cathedral today and you will find no grand monument to its designer Sir Christopher Wren. Instead in a quiet corner there is a plain stone plaque that on which is inscribed, "Reader, if you seek his memorial – look around you." The celebration of Wren's accomplishments could only be expressed through looking at what he had built; the architecture speaks for itself.

The Bible tells us that it's the same with God - the evidence of his creativity is all around us. All through the Scriptures we see that God's 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).

Alistair McGrath writes that "part of the purpose of the creator is that we should hear the music of the cosmos, and, through loving its harmonies, come to love their composer." Every note, every beat and every sound throughout creation reminds us that there is an infinite God who set the world in motion and who loves us.

Not only does creation sing, but God himself is singing too, like the composer conducting his symphony. The Father is described as rejoicing over us with singing in Zephaniah 3:17. The Son sings his hymn of praise to the Father in Mark 14:26, and in Ephesians, we see that the Holy Spirit inspires our singing, leading our praises. We are encouraged to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we may "speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). 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 creative souls bursting into life.

Charlie Mackesy is a gifted artist who has exhibited his work around the world and he attributes his talent for painting directly to his encounter with Jesus Christ. Describing what happened after his conversion he says 'When I was painting I became very aware of the Holy Spirit. It felt like he was encouraging me to paint things that expressed what I felt about him. I can't describe what I feel for Jesus, but my love for him is completely consuming. As a person, I am restless, fickle and get bored easily. There are only two things I have stuck at in my life – Jesus and my painting. With Jesus I know there is no-where else to go. He is my hope, my focus, my horizon. He is wild.'

Charlie's story echoes that of countless artists over the centuries. The church has been the focal point for great art, and not just architecture or painting. Two giants of the classical world, Bach and Handel, both wrote music specifically to encourage the worship life of their communities. Or what about the hymns that the civil rights movement sang as they marched to end segregation in 1960's America? Their grandparents had written simple songs of freedom while chained by slavery, and their songs still live on today.

Or what about William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army? Booth couldn't bear to watch the church decline and become more and more irrelevant and peripheral to society. So he stole songs from the pubs and streets of England and set the popular melodies of the day to godly lyrics. And this was what he said to his critics:

“It is to the soul what wind is to the ship, blowing her onwards in the direction in which she is already steered... Secular music you say? Belongs to the devil does it? Well if it did I would plunder him of it... every note and every strain and every harmony is divine and belongs to us.”

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, 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 up 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 steps:

1 Explore

“Children don't drag your feet in this! God has chosen you to take your place before him to serve in conducting and leading worship – this is your life work; make sure you do it and do it well.” (2 Chronicles 29:11, The Message)

Hezekiah's words are just as relevant for us today: the pursuit of creative excellence is not only a challenge, but a responsibility.

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. And the real danger comes when we feel that we've mastered our craft; when we feel confident in our ability to write a song, paint a picture or capture a photo.

Good is often the enemy of great: when we feel we've mastered something or become proficient in that skill, we need to be so careful. It's easy to get caught in ruts – churning out the same old predictable ideas. They may be good, but they'll probably fall short of being great. As Bishop William Quayle said, "When wonder is dead, the soul becomes a dry bone."

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. 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. Yes, we're all busy, but without devotion to hard work we're not going to see the results.

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:

'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, the time comes for 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.

Great creativity comes from a sense of tension, from the twilight between our reality and our longings - the language of the heart. Paul writes in the book of Romans that the whole creation has been groaning. It is the responsibility of the creative community in the church to give voice to this groaning. 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.” Our art should celebrate, mourn, stir and rouse the church; it should humble the proud and call the weary to battle.

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 cerebral words written to impress – the Psalms are the out-workings of the joys and struggles of their writers; encounters between the finite and the infinite that resonate with us all.

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 prayer of repentance that inspires the most moving of songs:

“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)

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. It's usually these honest and heartfelt ideas that most powerfully connect with others. Great art will voice and articulate those longings that lie deep within all of us. 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.”

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. “No great art has ever been made without the artist having known danger,” says the artist Rainer Maria Rilke, and this is true of worship too. If we don’t think outside the box and try new ideas then we will never truly develop in our work. For instance, for songwriters this may mean writing without our instruments, pushing lyrical boundaries, or using unusual instrumentation. There is great enjoyment to be found in trying new things, however absurd they may seem at first.

So much great work has been as a result of those ‘happy mistakes’. As a songwriter this may involve writing without your instrument, pushing lyrical boundaries, or using unusual instrumentation. It’s not just limited to music either: the movies are full of examples where creativity just creeps up on people. For instance, whilst writing the Star Wars movies, director George Lucas was editing another film with a colleague who asked Lucas for ‘Reel Two, Dialog Two’ which he abbreviated to R2D2. Lucas liked the sound of it so wrote it down, and a little bit of film history was made.

Trying something new – perhaps picking up a new instrument or trying out a different way of writing – will help release creativity. “Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep,” says the cartoonist Scott Adams, multi-award winning creator of ‘Dilbert’.

Of course experimentation will always involve courage. It will always carry the possibility that you will get it hopelessly wrong or end up being laughed at, but the rewards are great enough to make this a risk worth taking.

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

Here's another letter in response to a new hymn:

"Pastor, I am no music scholar; but I feel I know appropriate church music when I hear it. Last Sunday's new hymn, if you can call it that, sounded like a sentimental love ballad one might expect to hear crooned in a saloon. If you insist in exposing us to rubbish like this in God's house, don't be surprised if many of the faithful look for a new place to worship. The hymns we grew up with were all we need."

This letter is opposing the hymn 'Just as I am' written by Charlotte Elliot in 1836. 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.

4 Evaluate

It is often said that creativity is 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration. If this is the case, then how can we not be committed to hard work? How can we expect the first draft of a song to be perfect? It will invariably need to undergo a rigorous process of editing, developing and tweaking before it can be considered a 'finished work'. This is what we call 'evaluation' and it can be a painful process. But we must be prepared to ask tough questions of our work, to acknowledge and weed out its weaker elements. We have to be ruthless.

It is important to evaluate each initial song idea. Ask yourself probing questions: Are the lyrics fresh? Is the melody memorable and captivating? Can better words or images be used to communicate the theme? Is it theologically sound? Is there substance to this work? Is the song complete?

Songs of worship spring from encounters of worship. God reveals and inspires, but we then have a responsibility to do our bit, crafting and shaping these songs. The French novelist Emile Zola once said, "The artist is nothing without the gift, but the gift is nothing without the work".

The song 'Here I Am To Worship', by Tim Hughes, had a rocky start. It took many months, plenty of frustration and lots of time revisiting it to get it into shape. Even when it was finished Tim was unsure whether it really worked - but getting outside opinion from a trusted friend helped. Tell your own story about working on a song for a long time - be honest about the

frustrations and the importance of working hard to refine - as well as trusting others to give you insight and wisdom.

The danger when creating art is that we get so close to our work we lose perspective. That's why there often comes a point in the evaluation process at which outside input is needed, a fresh ear to bring a healthy critique. Collaboration like this is an important part of art; no one ever started a revolution on their own. As we evaluate our work it is also crucial to ask other creative and critical minds to review it, as this allows our ideas to be challenged and honed. Proverbs 27:17 reminds us; "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another", and it's not just musically that we might need help: if our songs are to shape people's understanding of God then it is imperative that they are theologically sound. Involving thinkers and theologians in the process of writing lyrics can be incredibly helpful.

The author Brian Maclaren writes, "In the modern world, theology was done by scholars, and was expressed in books and lectures. In the postmodern world, many of us believe that the theologians will have to leave the library more often and mix with the rest of us. And the best of them will join hands and hearts with poets, musicians, filmmakers, actors, architects, interior and landscape designers, dancers, sculptors, painters, novelists, photographers, web designers and every other artistic brother and sister possible...not only to communicate a postmodern, Christian theology...but also to discern it, discover it."

Agony & Ecstasy

There's a wonderful book on the Italian artist Michelangelo called 'The Agony and the Ecstasy'. The title alone perfectly captures the process of producing and creating great art, the phrase describes Michelangelo's incredible illustration of the story of the Bible, which he painted on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel at the beginning of the Sixteenth Century. For

Michelangelo, the expression of his art came at a great cost. The painting of the Sistine Chapel – years spent working in cramped conditions, with endless drips of paint pouring into his eyes – took a huge toll on his body. By the end of the process, he was ruined. But one of the earth’s great masterpieces was complete.

The art critic Vasari, a contemporary of Michelangelo’s, wrote that “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”.

Today the painting still shines down on ten thousand visitors every day. Each year, four million people visit the Sistine chapel to marvel at what is considered to be one of the pinnacles of human creativity. It is possibly the most visited work of art in the world, and also the most evangelistic, as people walk around it with headphones on telling them the story of the painting - that is, the gospel - in dozens of different language under the sun.

Shortly after work had begun, Michelangelo discovered to his horror that whole sections of freshly painted ceiling were disappearing in clouds of crippling 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. Creativity at its most powerful and lasting is expressed by a team working together. If we are to see creativity released in our churches, we must learn to work together, to champion each other’s ideas and to give each other space and permission to

innovate. There will be times when it will go horribly wrong, but unless we innovate we stagnate.

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? The theologian Mike Lloyd writes that, "The Christian community should be an artistic community. For human beings were made in the image of the creator and are therefore intrinsically creative."

If we want to get there, then the challenge is laid at each of our feet. 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?

Glory to God Alone

The Baroque composers JS Bach and George Handel were both born in 1685. They were giants, the leading musical lights of their age. In fact to this day they are both regarded as two of the greatest geniuses in the history of music. Each made the world brighter through their work, and to this day you'll still hear their compositions echoing out from concert halls, opera houses and churches all around the world today.

Amazingly, these two great composers never met. Rivals in the world's eyes, nevertheless one thing united them. Early on, they both decided to make the worship of Jesus central in their own life, and created to the glory of God. Their music was soaked with a sense of God's power and presence. And written at the end of each of their scores, were three simple letters, S.D.G. Short for 'Solo 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 - not our own egos or pride - will we let that be our motto as we ask God to release his creativity in our midst? And if we do all this to the glory of God alone, can we begin to imagine just how great the sight and sound could be? 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

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.