



Creative—and Christian! Biblical Principles

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"This is a most challenging and helpful book. It helped me in my development."
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The Netherlands

"So much truth, drawn from a lifetime's worth of experience—thanks for the inspiration!"
Elly & Rikkert (artists) The Netherlands

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Dr. Andy Lang (theologian, Lutheran Church) Germany

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Thus says the LORD:

*In a time of favour I have answered you,
on a day of salvation I have helped you;
I have kept you and given you
as a covenant to the people,
to establish the land,
to apportion the desolate heritages;
saying to the prisoners, 'Come out,'
to those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves.'
They shall feed along the ways,
on all the bare heights shall be their pasture;
they shall not hunger or thirst,
neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down,
for he who has pity on them will lead them,
and by springs of water will guide them.
And I will turn all my mountains into a road,
and my highways shall be raised up.*

Isaiah 49:8-11

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Foreword by Floyd McClung

Our God is a Creator. Everything he makes is done well. There is nothing in the Bible that tells us he has stopped creating. On the contrary. Seeing the beauty of creation in the lives of his creatures clearly shows that he is still at work.

He created the gift of music. Nevertheless, it is up to us to harmonize sound into a beautiful melody. He also made colour, yet we are given the opportunity to create beauty with it in all sorts of patterns. The closer one lives to God, the stronger the desire to create with him that develops. It is true to say that when one's spirit is born again, a longing grows to see the glory of God reflected in all forms of art.

This is true in the lives of both Leen and Ria La Rivière. We could say that they are involved in creating something beautiful for God by creating faith and hope in the hearts of God's children—so that through their art they may reflect the honour and glory of the most beautiful and resplendent Being in the whole universe. Follow their vision and dream by reading this book. Let your heart be filled with hope. Hope for a better world where people governed by the love of God reflect his beauty in their lives.

Floyd McClung was for several years the main speaker in the plenary meetings of the European Christian Artists Seminar. He was European leader of Youth With A Mission. He was pastor of a large church in Kansas City in the United States. After that he started a great mission outreach and training in South Africa

Foreword by Rory Noland

Because I am a music director in a church, I'm often asked what I would do if I had to choose between a highly talented musician who wasn't very spiritual and a deeply spiritual musician who wasn't very talented. I think that question captures the dilemma the church has been in with artists for a long time. My answer is: I want both! I want artists who are highly talented and deeply spiritual. In Exodus 35, we encounter an artist named Bezalel who sculpted beautiful works of art from gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood. The Bible says he was an excellent artist, but he was also filled with the Holy Spirit with skill, intelligence and knowledge (verse 31). He was an artist who was talented and godly. That's what we need to be shooting for! That's the biblical standard! Spiritual growth should be a high priority for every artist. We can't expect to get by on just talent alone. It's imperative that you and I keep growing both spiritually and artistically.

The most urgent matter facing any arts-related ministry today is the matter of character in the lives of our artists. For too long, churches all over the world have ignored this issue, letting questions of character slide. We've turned our heads, hoping the problem would go away. After all, we can't afford to scare off these artists because we need them every Sunday! Most of the questions I get about church music ministry today have little to do with music. They revolve around issues of character. Pastors especially are asking, 'How can we get our artists to minister with a servant's heart? What can we do about attitude problems we encounter on our arts teams? How can we get our artists to get along with each other better?'

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus taught that your character is your destiny. That's a value shift for us, because we tend to think that our destiny is all wrapped up in our talent. But our destiny doesn't hinge on what we do as artists but on who we are as

people. God never intended our character growth to be a low priority. We are all supposed to mature spiritually 'to the measure of the full stature of Christ'. We are to 'grow up in every way ... into Christ'.¹

In Psalm 101:2, David says, 'I will walk with integrity of heart within my house.' We artists need to be able to walk through the doors of the church with integrity in our hearts.

Psalm 4:3 says: 'Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself' (NIV). In the same way, the Lord has set apart the godly artist for himself. Set apart to experience intimacy with God. Set apart with a special gift or a unique talent. Set apart to be used by God in so many meaningful ways. Set apart—for him! I believe that God wants to raise up artists in the church who are 'set apart'. They are artists with godly character. They are people of integrity. They are not only greatly talented, they are humble, loving and approachable. They walk with God. They are so sold out to Jesus that people don't stand in awe of their talent, they stand in awe of their God.

These are exciting days because I believe we are on the verge of a 'golden era' for the arts in the church. I believe we are entering an era in church history where God is calling thousands of artists to use their gifts for him like he never has before. The church is the vehicle God is using to save lost people. And he's calling you and me to play a major role in this important work! What an honour! What a privilege! Oh, may we be found trustworthy! It's time we took stock of where we are all at spiritually and made sure that we are honouring God not only with our gifts but with our lives as well. It's time for us to be as serious about godly character as we are about our art. We need artists in the church who are known not only for their talent but also for their walk with Christ.

This is where Leen La Rivière's book *Creative—and Christian!* will serve you extremely well. It presents issues relevant to every artist in a powerful, thought-provoking way. It will encourage you, motivate you and inspire you. It will stimulate you to tend to your

character. In short, it'll help you to grow spiritually. I invite you to read each chapter like a devotional, because Leen's writing is truly food for the soul.

Rory Noland is the artistic director of the large Willow Creek Community Church, near Chicago. This church has a special ministry through the arts. To equip all its musicians and other artists he wrote the book The Heart of the Artist, based on years of personal experience, dealing with motivation, attitude, quality and service to the Body of Christ.

Preface

I first wrote this book in Dutch in 1986 whilst travelling through various European and African countries, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii—and sitting at home with a cup of good Dutch coffee. In 1987 it was translated into English under the title *Royal Creativity*, thanks to the care of many good friends and the incredible support of my family.

The chapters of this book contain a series of thoughts. You can read it all at once and discover the 'big picture' they present, or you can treat each chapter as a devotional passage to be read on its own. Each chapter can also form the basis for a small-group Bible study or a worship session in your church, college or place of work. The Bible verses that are the foundations for each chapter are listed in the footnotes. By reading more widely to understand the verses in their contexts, you will certainly dig up nuggets of gold!

In the original foreword I wrote: 'God is going to do new things and he will use creativity and the arts as his tool. I hope that this book may be a prophetic panorama encouraging all creative people, appealing to the church, providing vision for a renaissance that leads to a revival. God will pour out his Spirit. He gives us talents for creative use. As God creates, we can create.'

So what happened afterwards? Was the book just a great vision or did it have substance?

We started to live by what had been written. As a result we started seeing Christian artists stand up, go public, dare to create and renew and cross barriers. Churches were inspired to break out of their dull patterns and allow renewal through creativity; and creative churches became growing churches. Many believers were inspired to become creative and this enriched their personal lives and the lives of their families and friends.

At the same time, in the Netherlands and in some other countries, strong and growing arts groups and music associations

were formed. In the Netherlands, it resulted in the building of the Continental Art Centre in Rotterdam and in the creation of a Christian trade union for artists. That the content of this book was not just a dream or a great thought became very evident in 1999 with the 30th anniversary of the Continental Art Centre. It proved to be true.

But we saw that there were quite a number of places in Europe where the change towards creativity had not occurred. As a result, and because we long to see God's creativity released in his people everywhere, we decided to revise this book and translate it into many more languages. Some parts have been rewritten and new chapters have been added to include lessons we have learned since the publication of the first edition.

I am moved when I see what God has done. Let's not despise our society or culture. The point is not whether we agree with everything we see or hear or encounter. As John 3:17 tells us, God sent his Son into the world not to condemn it but to save it; and we too should not condemn the world but bless it instead—its peoples and its arts and cultures—because 'Emmanuel', God is with us.

Leen La Rivière
May 2004

Introduction: Art and Culture

by Calvin Seerveld

I am happy that Leen chose to use my remarks on 'art and culture' as an introduction to this book. Like him and his wife, Ria, I believe that composing music, designing clothes and making art are one good way we may exult in God's gifts to us as the Lord's 'royal priesthood', even though the times are tough. Scripture also charts us to be obedient to the Lord in our various trades by remaining mindful of the needs of our neighbour.

The prophetic (not 'imperialistic') biblical word of the Lord (Isaiah 54:1–3) for the people of God is this: enlarge the tented terrain where you cultivate things and culture the next generation, and also pound the tent stakes of your dwelling more firmly deep into the ground the Lord God provides. Or I could express the scriptural message this way: know with certainty your identity as a faith community, so you can be more hospitable to strangers, outcasts, unbelievers, even middle-class people or bankers (Isaiah 58:6–7, John 4:1–22, Matthew 25:31–46, Acts 10, James 2:14–17), as you freely struggle together, with the tent flaps blowing in the gusty wind, to do your art, make music, negotiate labour contracts, find just political solutions, teach, conduct funerals or whatever, in a way that lets God smile.

Christians do not have to save the world. The Holy Spirit will complete that work that Christ accomplished (Revelation 1:8, 2 Corinthians 5:19, John 14:1, 16:15 and 19:28–30). The adopted children of God in history need only gratefully to prepare the Way of the returning Lord, who will bring the refined cultural treasure of the nations (*ta ethne*), 'the ethnics', says scripture, finally into the

holy city when Emmanuel again lives on the new earth (Isaiah 60, Revelation 21:1–4 & 22–27).

The identity of a people of God

Secularization in Western civilization has privatized faith and left the church mostly a ceremonial ornament. Spirituality with an Eastern cachet ('the New Age') and Muslim fundamentalism have filled the vacuum left by an effete Christianity.

Also, rampant Individualism has left institutional groupings like marriage, family, church, unions, even certain nations, on tenterhooks, up for grabs, while globalization makes cultural activities in the public domain vaguely anonymous, no longer located anywhere specific. In such a floating, 'smorgasbord' culture, it would be good if churches provided a kind of intimate home base for face-to-face communion, where small circles of people could converse, question and answer about how the Bible tells us to live, so that we knew God's presence more surely. You need a community of faith around you for your own personal faith to grow.

This is true especially for artists, for power brokers in politics and the labour unions and for academics, who can live insulated lives. But very important to me for getting our tent stakes firmly in place is the crucial distinction, supported by scripture, between the Body of Christ (*corpus Christi*), the City of God (*basileia tou theou*) and the worshipping church institution (*ekklesia*). These three manifestations of God's Spirit at work in humans—Body of Christ, City of God, institutional church—are linked together but discrete, just as the Older Testament of the Bible describes when it reports Jerusalem becoming the city of God (because the Lord would ensure that justice was done among its inhabitants), and in that city a temple was built around the ark of God, where priests in the line of Aaron mediated the sacrifices and prayers of God's sinful but repentant people—city, temple, ark.

Since Pentecost, as I understand it, God's temple on earth is no longer a building constructed with stones in Palestine but the

communion of two or three saints, the Spirit-filled Body of Christ at large, in which every faithful disciple of Jesus Christ is a royal priest in the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110, Matthew 18:19–20, Hebrews 7:1–10:18 and 1 Peter 2:5–10).

Zion, the city of God, for Newer Testament followers of Christ is not the real estate contested by the Palestinian people and the Israelis but is wherever God's will is done in faith. Wherever on earth—in the arts, education, commerce or the political sphere, for example—the Messiah's redemptive Rule takes place, there is a manifestation of the holy city of God's ordering.

As for the crucial Older Testament ark of the covenantal LORD God, its rough, post-Resurrection biblical equivalent is found in the official, organized centre of congregational or parish liturgical worship presided over by ordained elders and deacons (or bishops, pastors or charismatics).

Although it may be too difficult for me to achieve precision in the slippery term 'church' in our discussion, what I am proposing could reorder our thinking more clearly. Christian Artists International is not a church, its board are not clergy and what it offers its participants is not the sacraments. But it is part of the body of Christ as a union—communion—of sinful saints who confess that Jesus is Lord of their artistry, their commercial contractual obligations and responsibilities, their life at large. And if I have not misunderstood it, what Leen and its other leaders have been after for over 20 years is to bring a measure of the Lord's *shalom* upon a younger generation's engagement in the arts, not in an ivory tower but in the muddy terrain of European labour and political unification, so that the members of Christ's Body gathered here for a few days may return to their distant places of work to spill Mary Magdalene's perfume (see Mark 14:3–9) over the feet of their neighbours—a redemptive sign of the coming of the City of God, the compassionate Rule of the Lord.

If we carefully conceive the identity of God's people in this threefold, overlapping, systematic way, these three things follow.

(1) The church does not have to reform the culture industry. The institutional church does not have a monopolistic authority over christian leadership in society. From a biblical viewpoint, it is the task of a union of christian artists—practitioners, critics, theorists, patrons—for example to configure the art world into a more normative place governed by imaginative meaning rather than its current, hard-nosed regimen of superstars and also-rans. From a biblical viewpoint, it is the task of christian labour leaders and management together to determine policies that promote employment at just wages making worthwhile products that people need, instead of pursuing a ruthless competitive drive to corner markets in luxury items.

Yes, the church will hold the hand of christian artists and officials in the world of commerce, and intercede for statesmen and women struggling to act justly, but it serves the frontline Body-of-Christ culture-workers best, I believe, when it minds its limited task of being a retreat providing 'rest and recuperation' for battle-fatigued, mature sons and daughters of the church exercising their competencies in society, and as an emergency room for those who have lost their way in society and must be cared for.

(2) Christ's Body is not a collection of devout, disconnected individuals. It is composed of persons who belong to a variety of confessional churches, a rainbow of language groupings and ethnic idiosyncrasies, a diversity of occupations, a geographic mix of neighbourhoods around the world, who are members of fractured families, warring tribes, with different levels of education. This variegated constituency of Christ's Body, both the natural and the organized unions of Christ's disciples busy cultivating the world, was present from the beginning, so to speak, even before the differentiated butterflies of races, professions and specially gifted groups matured from the cocoon of the early church.

(3) Christian artistry is not synonymous with art for the church. We also need art with redeeming quality proper for the liturgical, ecclesiastical setting of worship; but holy-spirited art aware of

sin yet bearing glimmers of hope, fit for the street, the cabaret and the theatre, the hospital, the airport, the mall and the art gallery, is most urgently needed if artists are to show love to their neighbours. You don't make art 'christian' by popping in 'Jesus words' or giving a verbal testimony between musical sets in a gig, any more than you become a liberating labour union by having 'Christian' in your name and opening meetings with a formal prayer. As I understand it, 'christian' art, whether outside or inside the church doors, does not have to advertise its allegiance to the Lord but simply proffers imaginative insight and understanding that are compassionate, troubled, healing.

What time is it culturally in the world?

We live today worldwide in a technocratically compressed society—I would say a global high-rise, not a village—where the commercialization of human nature is so pervasive that it becomes natural for everybody—poor Asian as well as rich American—to live out passionately the creed 'Me first!' The universal drive to live for the consumption of goods superficializes relationships and corrodes 'local' cultures, and is a mark of immaturity, of vanishing or lost faith-identity. And such individualistic, subjectivistic Mammon is the major export of Euro-American culture to the world. 'Individualism', in ordinary language, is philosophical masturbation, mere self-preoccupation. 'Subjectivism', in ordinary language, is the pragmatist dictum 'Me is God!' The combination of subjectivistic and individualistic greed is pandemic, I think, and is even worse in the world than Aids is in Africa, because the SIG virus (subjectivistic, individualistic greed) lets those who are dead to God walk around as if they know 'the art of living'.

Some think the Western church has drowned itself in trying to rescue our floundering secularized civilization. Some say the church has not really understood our sophisticated, ironic culture, which amuses itself to death with erotic violence and thrives on

experimentalism, and so the church has tended to censor the arts and revert to a more old-fashioned idealism.

For me, Christ's church is not a volunteer organization that you coax people to join, like 'the Y'. Christ's church is God's handpicked, adopted children who have heard the word of salvation and been branded for life by God's Spirit (Galatians 4:4–7, 1 Peter 2:9–10) to undergo persecution for living in accordance with our Lord's teaching. Our task is often rather steadiness under pressure than dramatic breakthroughs (Romans 8:12–17, Philippians 1:27–30). Christian artists should be prepared to take their membership in Christ's Body and church with a quietly determined seriousness.

Faithful artistic snake-and-dove responses in God's world

It's true that we church are often more like a confusing smokescreen between God and unbelievers than the winsome midwife of *shalom*; but as God's people in a post-christian period of history, pummelled by the principalities of technocratic pragmatism and a powerful cultural élite gone quite deliberately, urbanely profane, our calling is to give away the Lord's gifts indiscriminately, and do it in a way that is as worldly-wise as snakes while remaining as innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16). Also, everybody should give away to their neighbours, in the particular time and place God has allotted them, what is truly needed rather than just whatever they have in surplus, lest the receivers resent the gifts and, ultimately, the Giver.

What does this mean for making art in the coming generation? In the Bible, 'new' does not mean 'novel'. A 'new' song (Psalm 33:1–3, 40:1–3 and 96:1–6) refers to a melody that will not wear out, will not become out-of-date. I think the criterion we need for deciding what art is 'new' (that is, what past art is worth remembering) and judging what contemporary artistic activity deserves our attention at present—Is video installation more engrossing than other art forms?—is this: Does the art-making and the artistry build up

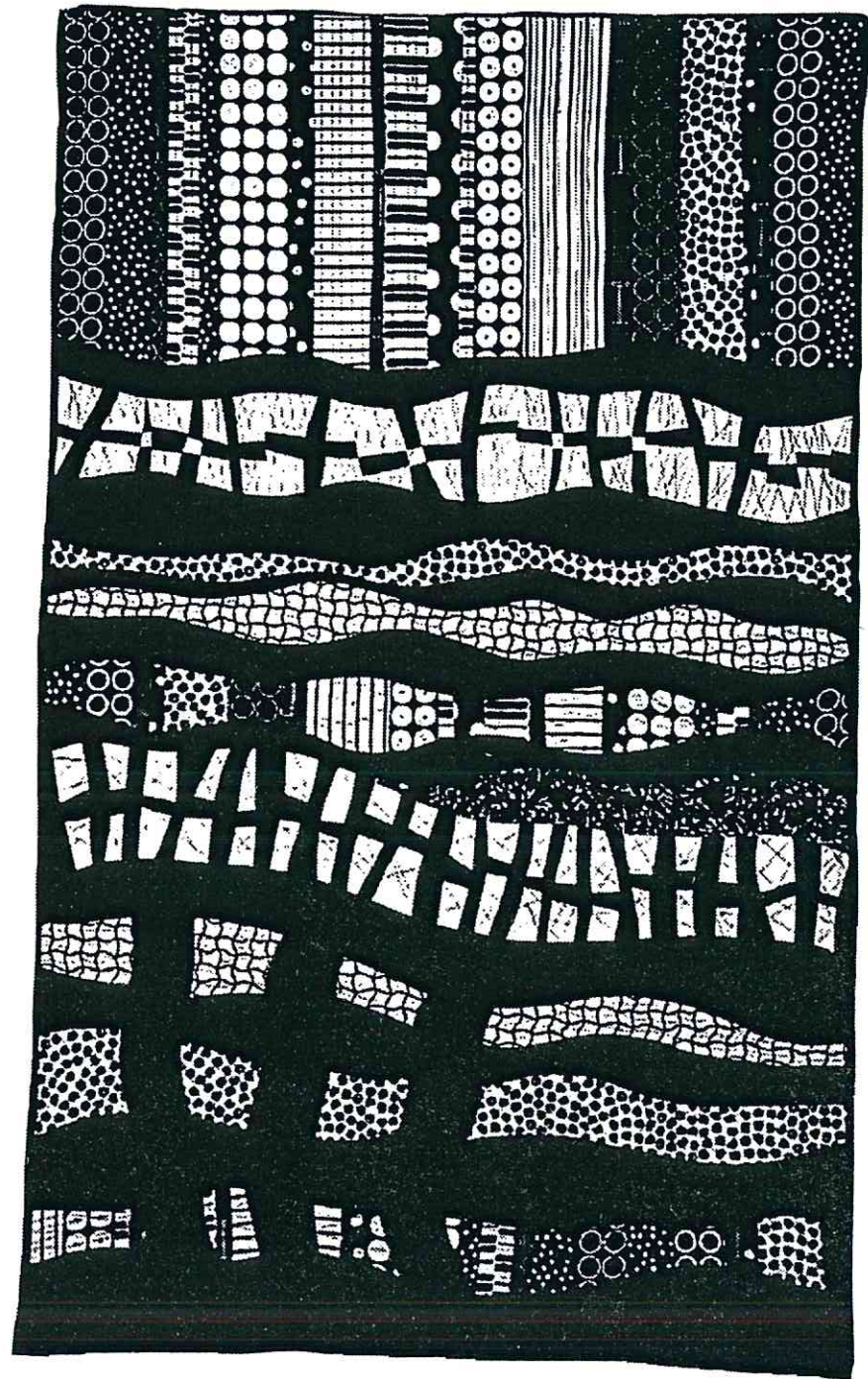
imaginative human abilities and, in an allusive way, proffer to attentive neighbours sorrowful wisdom and good cheer for 'the art of living' in God's troubled world? If so, it will be genuinely 'new' art that endures.

No matter what is in store for the earthly culture of your generation, Isaiah's word of God about firm tent stakes and the stretching-out of a canopy is reliable. Let God's people as a faith community spread out in ethnic diversity around the world, preparing their cultural offerings as living, imaginative sacrifices, to discover the forgotten host of artistic witnesses from the past and forge a minority culture, God willing—not a 'counter-culture'—a minority culture of well-staked *shalom* in a post-christian age that has lost its moorings and is blowing in the wind, a winsome minority culture that will conceive and consecrate diaconal artistry that will deepen everyday life.

Read this book of reflections, which come straight from the heart, as an encouragement that will bless you with stamina for the race in faith set before us (Hebrews 12:1–2). The Lord Jesus Christ is a-coming!

Calvin Seerveld is Emeritus Professor of Philosophical Aesthetics at the Institute of Christian Studies in Toronto, Canada. He travels widely as a public speaker and is the author of several books, including How to Read the Bible to Hear God Speak, Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves and Being Human. In the Fields of the Lord, edited by Craig Bartholomew, is a reader introducing the scope of his writings and lectures on the arts, aesthetics, worship and daily living.

Opposite: Dangerous Journey (2002) by Leslie Morgan (after the title of a children's version of Pilgrim's Progress), 80x135 cm, machine pieced and quilted from 100% commercial cottons



Does God's creation need commentary?

Haven't we all come across them: postcards with a verse of scripture at the bottom? A scene of beautiful mountains or flowers spoilt by a text? Any words added to a scene like that are wasted. God's message is in those mountains and flowers. They speak for themselves.

When the Lord created the world, he said seven times, 'It is good.' That was all. Nothing more needed to be said, for all he made spoke of perfection, of beauty. The product itself was the message. So, why should we provide a commentary? Or are we blind to the message of creation? Have we lost our sense of beauty?

After creating beautiful mountains and flowers, the Lord finally created humankind. The Bible tells us that we were created in the image of God and in his likeness. Isn't that something? We are made in such a way that we reflect the image and likeness of God. We are capable of creating things as well! God has also given us a sense of beauty, an eye for diversity. God has given us dignity. What are we doing with such wonderful gifts?

Unfortunately, the practice of adding verses of scripture to things is not restricted to postcards only. Very often, artists are put under pressure to add a religious ingredient to their work. Their product is not allowed to be the message—it is the religious symbol or reference that is supposed to give it its quality.

Obviously, there will be Christian artists who choose to create artistic work with religious content, but the fact that the artist is a Christian should not automatically mean that their work needs to show a religious dimension. We should never impose such a demand on anyone.

Christian artists need all the encouragement they can get to produce beauty and quality in order to glorify God. Just like anyone else, they also need appreciation in order to grow in their ability to perform. Their work is their message, whether the theme is religious or not. Art plays a vital part in the cultural life of a nation, and sometimes beyond. Let us therefore strengthen the creative among us! Their work doesn't need commentaries. Inspired by their faith in a living and creative God, their work will reflect his quality.

And God saw that the light was good ... God saw that it was good ... God saw that it was good ... God saw that it was good ... God saw that it was good ... God saw that it was good ... God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.²

². >the numbers in the texts refer to notes and biblical references, can be found on the pages 115 - 119

In our image, in our likeness...

As mentioned in the last chapter, God made humankind in his own image and likeness.³ This puts us in a special place. We are different from the rest of the creation. We were made to rule. Nowadays, the word 'rule' can have a negative connotation, but where the Lord rules, his love abounds. We were meant to govern in the same spirit.

Being made in the image and likeness of God implies that we are also creative and inventive. Genesis 1:26 tells us that we were meant to reign with God.⁴ Some try to overspiritualize this by saying that reigning with God is something we will do in eternity, but it is for the here and now.

Even the Fall doesn't change that. The only thing that changed after the Fall was that from then onwards everything had to be done 'by the sweat of our brow'.⁵ Circumstances changed, but not the activity itself.

Living in the presence of God leads some to suggest that we enjoy a sort of eternal holiday. In other words, inactivity. Nothing is further from the truth! Being created in his image and likeness means active creativity. Those who suppress creativity in human beings act against God's nature. Life means growth. God is infinite and therefore there is always more. Church leaders who suppress creativity in their congregations frustrate the work of the Holy Spirit. This is wrong. Adam is a good illustration of creativity. Eden was no Holiday Inn. Adam had to be active and creative from the start. Have you ever tried to think of a new word for something? Hard work, isn't it? Yet Adam had to think up many new words when all those creatures were brought to him to be named.⁶

Jesus came to earth so that he could find his bride. We are told in Revelation 21 that this bride adorns herself for her Bridegroom.

The church makes herself beautiful for her Lord. How many of us are consciously involved in beautifying the church? Are we allowed to be creative? Or are we just allowed to attend solemn services, and equally solemn prayer meetings and Bible studies? Being made in the image of God, in his likeness, means that his Spirit needs to find creative expression through our lives.

So, as we prepare for the coming of Christ Jesus we need to put to work our gifts, and also our creative talents and sense of beauty. A church active in the Kingdom of God will use every individual gift to its greatest potential.

A new Eden is approaching.

So God created humankind in his image.

*... God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'*⁷

*'You have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,
and they will reign on earth.'*⁸

There is nothing wrong with art

The fact that a great development of skill and art was seen among the descendants of Cain has led to a tragic misunderstanding: Cain's people were sinful, therefore their work must be sinful too. But in fact their skill was great.⁹ There was nothing wrong with it. What was wrong was their motivation. They abused their creative skills and used them to feed their pride and arrogance rather than to give glory to God. So, this civilization ended in the Flood.¹⁰

The conclusion that culture, art and skilled craftsmanship are things to be avoided is a grave misconception. It has robbed us of beauty. It has distorted the image of God. Proper use of the arts is a great channel through which we can glorify God. We see this in both the Old and the New Testament. Did Noah despise artistic skill when building the ark? Did God not bless with skill those who built the tabernacle? And those who built the Temple? Did God not call David 'a man after his heart'? David was a great artist, full of creativity. No, if we believe that art is something sinful, or 'the work of the flesh' as some people put it, we make it impossible for God's gift of creativity to be exercised properly.

We should never see the departure of Abram from Ur as an escape from society into a safe 'promised land'.¹¹ There is no such place as Arcadia. Some of us like to hide behind our church walls, afraid to become 'conformed to the world'. Or we are afraid to express ourselves artistically because we fear we would be glorifying ourselves. If that's your fear, don't be afraid. Your very fear proves that you want to bring glory to God and not to yourself. Do away with the fear that stops creativity—let us trust that the Lord can direct our creativity for his glory instead!

There is nothing wrong with art; art is not a disease to be avoided. It is a tool for glorifying our Maker in this world. But, if we

fail to create for God, the enemy will gain ground and abuse of art will be rife. We are called to resist the Devil, says James 4:7. But if Christians in the arts are silent, 'negative beauty' will spread like cancer.

Where are the Christian sculptors, musicians, painters, performers? If Christians are called to be the salt of the world, they certainly can be salt in cultural life, in the academies of this world, the broadcasting houses, media centres and scientific institutions too, for the message of the Kingdom is good news for every sphere of society.

Christian artists, and non-artists too, should leave their Christian ghettos and take up battle against the ruler of this world which is the spirit of darkness.¹²

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*¹³

The art of blessing

Suppose God has given you no particular gift. It's very unlikely, but let us pretend that this is the case. Does that mean you have nothing to give? What about the proper use of your faculties, such as speech? You may not have any artistic gifts, but what about using your mouth creatively?

In our days of modern communication skills it seems strange that the power of the word has so diminished. It was quite different in the days of the Old and New Testaments. For instance, if someone gave a blessing it could not be altered, even if a mistake was made. We all know about the blessing Isaac gave to Jacob.¹⁴ No, the spoken word was not fickle in those days. Nor was its effect uncertain.

The words spoken were always fulfilled. The Bible is full of such examples. When Balaam was asked to curse the Israelites, God wouldn't let him. Instead, he put his blessing in Balaam's mouth!

We may be tempted to think that uttering such blessings was something for those days but not for us today. Who says so? There is nothing in the Bible that tells us that this privilege of blessing others has been taken away. Paul even instructs us to bless those who persecute us, emphasizing that we should bless and not curse.¹⁵ Blessing others requires creativity. It means being aware of God's desires for the other person and speaking them out. That is quite different from the words 'Bless you!' we hear today. Those words have totally lost their meaning.

If it is true that you have no particular gift, then asking God to bless others is a great way to build the church. Even then you can be very fruitful in serving the Lord. Your words matter. Blessing can really strengthen the church. God can bring about those things that you have blessed your brother and sister with in him!

In one of his books, Jamie Buckingham gives a humorous example of blessing someone. His daughter's boyfriend was behaving in a rather obnoxious way. Rather than resenting his presence, Jamie and his wife decided to bless the lad creatively. He soon changed—and now he's a delightful son-in-law!

Blessing others is an art form and requires creativity. Whatever we do, whatever our creativity produces, is that a blessing? A blessing that brings forth fruit? By blessing others we show the creative character of God in words. How much more can we show it in our non-verbal expressions!

*'I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'*¹⁶

*By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,
but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.*¹⁷

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.*¹⁸

Integrity

After Jacob had spent a long time with his in-laws, the Lord instructed him to return to the land of his fathers, together with his whole household. Somehow he knew that he couldn't just do that. Something was bothering him. He was aware of the fact that his wives had foreign gods, while he had promised to serve the one true God. And he knew that going home with foreign gods among them would call his integrity into question.

We may wonder why Jacob had allowed things to go that far. But how many of us allow impure motives to invade our activity? How many idols slip into our way of life? How many artists have compromised their standards in order to find acceptance for their work? Not in the least motivated by the lure of Mammon, of course!

When God wants to reveal himself to us, we too may become aware of our lack of integrity. Jacob did not need a Bible study or prayer meeting to find out what to do. No, he knew he had to act himself, preparing the ground for a meeting with God. Likewise, we have to purify our lifestyle if we want to see God move in our lives. The pressure to compromise may be extreme from time to time. Artists often experience rejection and feel that their motives are misunderstood. Often they are being pressured into creating something the public wants, rather than something according to their vision. Christian leaders should beware of putting artists in their midst under that kind of pressure.

Joseph, who was put under great pressure to compromise when working for Potiphar, should be an example to us. He didn't trade his integrity. We read in Genesis 39 how this got him into prison, a place of suffering. Yet even there his integrity was beyond question. He worked for the Lord whatever the circumstances. God honoured him greatly.

Often, great works of art are produced out of great suffering. Suffering brings understanding of reality, understanding of truth. It strips away superficiality. It awakens our creative talent. It looks for ways to express itself. We see the same thing in nature: pruning leads to more abundance. When our integrity is tested, we have the opportunity to grow in our skill and ability. It is far better to spend time in prison like Joseph than to prostitute ourselves.

So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes; then come, let us go up to Bethel, that I may make an altar there to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.' So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak that was near Shechem.¹⁹

'No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'²⁰

Worth remembering?

Many times in the Bible we read that people erect memorial stones. They want to remember something very special and by putting up a stone they provide themselves with a visual aid to remind them. It is quite biblical to mark off special events or days in order to celebrate in remembrance of something. There are too many examples to mention. In the last chapter I wrote about how Jacob had to return home. The first thing he was going to do was to build an altar at the place where God had spoken to him earlier. There he would find the stone he erected then.

Memorials are quite different from the stones worshipped by pagans. Memorial stones are not worshipped and they never should become the object of worship. We can learn this from the episode when the Israelites had to look at the bronze snake Moses had made in order to be saved from death. The snake was kept as a memorial, but it had to be destroyed in the end as it became an object of worship.

Yet God's people in the scriptures knew how to celebrate. They knew how to appreciate things. Is that true of us today? What do we count as precious? And how do we handle the problem of forgetting God's goodness? I fear that few of us understand how to erect memorial stones. Perhaps we have to learn to be, and remain, grateful to the Lord. Thanking others doesn't come naturally to us. How often do we have to exhort our children to say 'Thank you' when they are given something?

Artists can play a great role in creating works of art in order to commemorate something. Let us fight the dullness of the church and put colour where it belongs! Is there nothing we have to thank God for? Are all the things God is doing in our lives not worth remembering? Then give them expression! This is important not

only for the professional artist but for every creative member in the church. Leaders, open wide your doors for a diverse expression of thanksgiving in your churches! Then we can say, 'Here God has met with us.' Wouldn't the church become alive and exciting and full of dynamic expression? Life is so worth living already if we hold its great moments in remembrance.

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel.²¹

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah, and named it Ebenezer, for he said, 'Thus far the LORD has helped us.'²²

The great I Am

God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.'²³ What a statement! Have you ever sat back to take in the full significance of this declaration? God defines himself in terms of his identity. His identity implies a great creative ability: I Am. One could say that the problem in today's church is one of identity. So many wrestle with the question of who they are, without having an understanding of who they can be in Christ.²⁴ When a person turns to Christ, he can see a full restoration of his being into the image and likeness of God.²⁵

Some of us dare not even think about the fact that we all have our own identity. Yet God made us all as unique individuals. We are irreplaceable. We are so precious in the sight of God that he sent his Son to deliver us from our limitations. Our uniqueness is illustrated by the fact that our fingerprints are unique. Recently, science has also demonstrated that we all have our own individual (and therefore unique) DNA structure. If God takes such care concerning our outward identity, wouldn't he concern himself with the full development of our inner quality?

God wants to bring us to a point where we can say of ourselves with full confidence: 'I am.' Founded on him, we can develop our identity to the full glory of God. It is the only way in which the beauty of diversity can be seen in the Kingdom of God. So it is strange that so many churches seem to be afraid of this diversity. Instead of encouraging people to develop their identity, we see the reverse: a suppression of gifted members.

It is breathtaking when we see how God filled the life of Moses with God-given identity: 'See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh.'²⁶ There is no limit to what God can do with a trusting and surrendered life. God wants to fill us with his thoughts, his love,

his compassion, his life, so that we can develop into completely fulfilled people.

Those who are wrestling with their identity actually sin against God. They are holding on to themselves, trying to make something of their lives in their own strength. This struggle is totally misplaced and a tragic waste of God's precious time. The key to deliverance from this problem lies in allowing God to show you yourself in his light and letting him fill you with his inspiration.

The book of Revelation also develops the theme of 'I am.'²⁷ These scriptures are so full of encouragement. Because I am made in the image and likeness of God, I can say with confidence: 'I am!' And so we bring into existence what already is.

*Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.*²⁸

Whoopee!

You may think I've gone mad, but let me tell you: that is exactly the word that comes to mind when I have something to celebrate. It may not be part of your vocabulary, but think of what you say when you're bursting with excitement. God's people had no hesitation in celebrating when God had done something wonderful for them. How does the church celebrate today? Does it celebrate at all?

Have you ever seen a feast like the one the Lord's people enjoyed after they were led through the Red Sea?²⁹ Having experienced deliverance from the Egyptians and seen their destruction, the Israelites erupted in song and dance. There was a very deep and genuine outburst of creativity, including excellent poetry, in which the whole congregation participated. Have you ever seen that happen in your church?

Would there be room for spontaneous celebration in our churches today? It seems that most churches would limit their expression of gratitude to a well-prepared testimony or the singing of a hymn—if lay people were allowed to open their mouths at all! How sad... Traditions are hard to break. I've observed that the fear of the unknown lies at the heart of this matter. But how can we celebrate? One problem, particularly in the West, is that we tend to regard feasting as a waste of our time. The Protestant work ethic is deeply engrained in our souls. Having a good time makes us feel guilty.

There are plenty of celebrations in the Bible. In Leviticus 23 we find several major feasts described: the Passover, the Feast of Weeks (Firstfruits) and the Feast of Tabernacles (Harvest). There was plenty of eating, singing and dancing when the Israelites had something to celebrate. It wasn't limited to just one day either! According to Proverbs 15:15, for the cheerful of heart life is a continual feast. And

our hearts should be cheerful. Let us get rid of our drabness! See what a feast resulted from the return of the prodigal son!³⁰

Celebrating in God never results in wild parties. As long as our gratitude is to God, things don't get out of hand. But creativity will flourish. Is our lack of creativity one of the reasons we don't know how to celebrate? Are we robbing God of his greatness? Do we radiate gratitude or are we just a very boring bunch of people? I'm afraid that the latter description fits many churches. Open wide your doors and let the Spirit of God lead you into celebration! There is plenty of room for showing him your appreciation. Let's keep the feasts!

*All the days of the poor are hard,
but a cheerful heart has a continual feast.³¹*

*'And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;
for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!'³²*

A royal priesthood

The Bible tells us that we are to be both kings and priests to God.³³ We are to display royal behaviour, for we have been entrusted with power, authority and dignity to represent the Lord on this earth. We are also expected to behave like priests. A priest is someone who is totally given to serving others. He mediates between God and humankind. A priest is called to lead people into worshipping God in purity and holiness. The apostle Peter put it this way: 'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.'³⁴

Recognising these responsibilities can overwhelm us. This ministry doesn't allow any of us to hide ourselves in little corners, safe from everything that threatens us. If you feel afraid, let the fact that it frightened the disciples as well comfort you!³⁵ But who turned these frightened men into bold kings and priests? The Holy Spirit. He turned fear into faith, and he will do the same for us—if we let him.

You may be tempted to think that this task of being kings and priests is reserved for a select few. This would be a rather negative attitude, because it's a privilege God wants to give us rather than a duty he exacts from us. We are all called to be kings and priests, but not everyone will take up this challenge. We don't need to be spiritual giants in order to qualify. No, all we need is faith in a great God. Jesus put the whole thing into its right perspective when he compared the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed. It starts out small, but soon it develops into a big tree.³⁶ God will take the small and he will create something big. All he wants from us is a seeking and obedient heart. Out of such a renaissance of the heart come a renaissance of life and a renaissance of culture and society.

Obedient and faithful artists have the opportunity to be kings and priests in their field. Through images or sounds they can interpret God's character to the world. They can defend the right standards and fight decadence. They can proclaim the Truth, and in doing so reconcile the world to Jesus as Lord. Royal priests indeed!

*'Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.'*³⁷

*Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*³⁸

The tabernacle: a work of art

In Exodus we find an account of how the tabernacle was built. The long, detailed lists of all the materials may tempt us to skip quite a few passages. Yet if we do so we may miss a lot. If you visualize the things that were going on at the time, you will see a wonderful art exhibition!

The Lord was quite selective in who was to take part in the exercise.³⁹ They had to be craftspeople. God gave them the skill. He also chose his leaders: Bezalel and Oholiab. The tabernacle and its contents were something to be seen!

The great thing about the building of the tabernacle and the making of all the utensils &c—each one a work of art—was that the people were so supportive.⁴⁰ This makes my heart jump for joy! Can you imagine what would happen if today church leaders and congregations backed their artists to the hilt?

Something happened in history that has greatly influenced the church in its attitude towards the arts: the Reformation. In their zeal to deal with some idolatrous practices, Protestants destroyed everything they regarded as sinful. In their view, Catholics worshipped their beautiful works of art and therefore all of them had to be destroyed, regardless of their content. In doing this, the Protestants displayed their ignorance of the beauty of God—and as a result the churches they built became very bare and very boring.

Unfortunately, it was not only buildings that suffered. A misconception about the role of art became engraved upon people's minds: it was something sinful. It was identified with idolatry itself. People made no distinction between the fact that art had been abused sometimes for idolatry and the fact that art in itself is God-given. Thus in recent centuries Christians

have withdrawn from culture and society and left them to non-Christians.

So, don't be surprised by the negative society of today! And let's return to the Bible and see for ourselves the many works of art we can find there as an expression of God's beauty!

That the utensils of the Temple from Solomon's day were something special we can see from the story about Belshazzar. In Daniel 5 we are told how he gave orders for the gold and silver goblets to be used during one of his feasts. These had been taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and it's obvious that he saw them as very precious.

So did God, who judged the man for this lack of respect. We are the temples of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ We are his workmanship⁴²—precious works of his art! When the tabernacle was finished, God was so pleased with it that he filled it with his presence. That was too much for Moses, who could not enter.⁴³ What if that happened to our temples? I would be beside myself with joy!

For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

*'I will live in them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.'*⁴⁴

True worship

It can be said that all humankind are worshippers. The whole reason why we were created was so that we could worship God. It's important therefore to know what worship really means. We can understand this a little better when we see that the word 'worship' appears for the first time in the Bible when Abraham chose to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.⁴⁵ Which is not to say that people didn't worship before that time. Of course they did.

What Abraham was willing to do in giving Isaac to God is the best illustration of true worship: the total surrender of ourselves and all that is dear to us to God. Worship is totally focused upon the other, not on ourselves. The quality of our worship is measured by how much of ourselves we yield, and to whom we render worship.⁴⁶ How many of us worship cars, TV stars, sport &c? We can easily tell who people are by what they worship.

Our worship of God may not always be acceptable. Motives are important.⁴⁷ He knows our hearts and therefore our motives. Cain serves as a good example.⁴⁸ Somehow his offering did not give the same delight to God as his brother's. God discerned a different attitude in him. Later in history the Lord communicated some regulations about offerings so that people would understand what he desired.⁴⁹ Basically, these regulations conveyed the message that God's holiness is not to be trampled on or taken lightly. From the New Testament we learn that the law also taught us that of ourselves we are unable to please God, because we are rooted in selfishness.⁵⁰

Jesus, in his total surrender to his Father, has become our way to worship God.⁵¹ He opened the door so that we can worship too.

This doesn't mean that we can become like Cain and give God our offerings with mixed motives. Artists do well to understand

that. Their ability comes from God and so their work should bring glory to their Maker. Purity in motivation is so important. Their inspiration needs to be fresh, inspired by the Holy Spirit. God's work is always fresh, always new, bringing harmony into a broken world. Giving all, from a pure heart, remains the only way in which we can worship our God!⁵² Worship is not a form. It can be music, it can be spoken or danced. Worship can be the art of drinking tea, or painting, or doing business.⁵³ Real worship is an attitude: a lifestyle of royal priests.

*Aaron lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them; and he came down after sacrificing the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the offering of well-being ... and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people ... and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.*⁵⁴

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*⁵⁵

Unauthorized fire

Reading the last chapter you may feel that I'm rather heavy-handed about worship. Yet the Bible gives us some very penetrating examples of severe judgement when people worshipped wrongly. Look at Leviticus 10:1–2. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, took their censers, put fire in them and added incense, and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So, fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them. King Saul also had to pay a high price for offering worship for the wrong motives and against the word of Samuel in 1 Samuel 13:9–14.

In both cases, God had revealed his will but none of them discerned the holiness implied in that will. We cannot tamper with God's revealed will in order to suit our circumstances. Probably everyone involved thought they were doing something good for God. What can be wrong in offering something to God? But God doesn't want our 'good ideas'.

That is often the very reason why enthusiasm can be a misleading guide. Enthusiastic people often don't take the time to find out God's will. They are so full of what they want to do that they forget to test it against the will of God. Where do our actions stem from?

It cannot be God's purpose to make us afraid of worshipping him. Worship is the very thing he wants. Why then did he deal so severely with Aaron's sons and with Saul? Was he being unreasonable? I don't think so. In both cases God had been very clear about his wishes. Yet in each case his holiness was ignored. His will was not central to their actions but their own ideas. They saw nothing wrong in that. What could be wrong in offering God something? But God didn't want their offerings in the way they were giving them (which was not even according to the rules of

how to sacrifice). God is far more pleased with our obedience than with our offerings!⁵⁶

The same principles apply today. The Lord has given us the Holy Spirit. He is our teacher and our guide.⁵⁷ If we lack wisdom, we are advised to ask God for wisdom.⁵⁸ Obviously, if we are young Christians we will have to learn how to depend on the Holy Spirit. We can also go to our leaders if we're in doubt. But even then we are always responsible for our actions—we can't hide behind our leaders. Remember that severe punishment only followed after God's revealed will was ignored. That was a conscious and deliberate act. So, we don't need to be afraid to make mistakes: God sees the motives of our hearts. Both Aaron's sons and Saul knew they had no authority to act in the way they did. God is a testing fire.

Human enthusiasm may be cheap and soon burnt out. We need a solid foundation for our spiritual wellbeing, and we need to develop skills and artistic disciplines so that we bring not unauthorized fire but a revelation of the Holy God.⁵⁹

*'Bringing offerings is futile;
incense is an abomination to me ...
When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood ...
Cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.'*⁶⁰

A gift not to be grasped

Having examined some traumatic events involving unauthorized authority in the last chapter, it may be good to look at a positive example of authority handled properly. Moses once faced a rebellion of some 250 men, who challenged his and Aaron's leadership, suggesting that they had usurped their authority.⁶¹ What did Moses do? Crush the rebellion with a heavy hand? Defend himself with all sorts of arguments? No. He fell face down in prayer. He expected the Lord to deal with this challenge. And he did. God showed that those who accused Moses and Aaron of usurping authority were usurpers themselves. They paid a very high price—death.

What lay at the root of this rebellion? Why did these men covet the priesthood? They were already in a privileged position, working in the tabernacle in the presence of God. The answer is that in their hearts they longed for Egypt. They didn't agree with the direction they were going in.⁶² It wasn't Moses and Aaron they rebelled against, it was God himself! And even after the Lord had clearly affirmed Moses and Aaron as leaders by judging the rebels, the people still grumbled. They saw Moses and Aaron as the culprits, blaming them for the judgement!

The Lord heard it with dismay and he caused a plague to break out among the people. He was fed up with them, as we would say today. But even in those circumstances Moses and Aaron displayed their shepherds' hearts. They were true priests. Aaron stood between the living and the dead and persuaded God to stop the plague. Even so, this episode put an end to 14,700 lives. What a tragedy! Still, a further demonstration that Moses and Aaron derived their authority from God had been needed before the assembly.

Both these men stood tall under the strain of being challenged. If they had relied on their own resources by using force or other means, no one would have been impressed. They probably would have lost the case, if the people had sided with the rebels—for they too would have liked to return to Egypt, as life seemed easier there than in the never-ending desert! But as Moses and Aaron relied on God, the message about their leadership was loud and clear: Don't touch my anointed ones!

Don't grasp authority! Look at what Aaron had to do in Numbers 17. He had to bring his rod, along with the heads of the other tribes. Aaron's rod blossomed and bore fruit. Aaron had to give God the time to establish him as leader. If you have a leadership position, give God the time to establish you in your leadership! Never try to prove yourself!

When Moses went into the tent of the covenant on the next day, the staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted. It put forth buds, produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds.⁶³

Jesus answered, 'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, "He is our God."⁶⁴

It only takes a few

It's often thought that it takes a lot of people to change the course of history. This may sound reasonable, but history proves otherwise. We only have to look back a few decades to see one man's negative impact on human affairs: Adolf Hitler. However, the Bible gives us plenty of examples of how great changes have been achieved through the actions of a few.⁶⁵

Gideon was such a man.⁶⁶ He was very reluctant to get involved when the Lord called him. He didn't believe he could change the course of events in his nation. However, his obedience to God achieved just that. The situation was transformed as defeat was turned into victory. How? Through a massive battle? No, the Lord only gave him 300 men against an overwhelming army!

What about the apostles? What a bunch of people the Lord had picked to proclaim his kingdom!⁶⁷ Not much to write home about... This handful of men had to face opposition from the well-educated religious élite, yet their obedience turned the world upside-down!⁶⁸

In 2 Kings 4:38-41 we are told how the prophet Elisha returned to Gilgal during a famine. A whole company of prophets came to meet him, so he told his servants to make a stew. They added some gourds from a wild vine they found while collecting herbs and it made the stew poisonous. We would probably have thrown it away, but remember there was a famine. What did Elisha do? He told them to add some flour and the stew became edible again. The faith in action of one man glorified God.

Perhaps we should examine our attitude in the light of this story. How many of us are tempted to reject and discard our culture because we see it as poisonous? Why not add some flour instead? Why not give of ourselves to neutralize the forces of darkness?

Curling up in our own little ghettos won't bring about any change! If we hide ourselves, we have no right to complain. No, the action of one person can bind the forces of darkness in order to bring victory. May light enter our culture and our society! The light of God!

*'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.'*⁶⁹

A man after God's heart

The Bible records in several places that David was a man after God's heart. When we study his life it becomes quite clear that he had a very intimate relationship with God which was warm and respectful. We all know about Solomon's wisdom—his writings bear witness to it. But in David's writings we can feel his heartbeat. In this chapter, I want to take a closer look at David's life, so that we can understand why he was so greatly loved by God.

When Samuel was sent to anoint David as king, God exhorted him not to look at the outward appearance of men, because the Lord looks at the heart.⁷⁰ By human standards, David would not have qualified. He wouldn't have met the selection criteria. He was only tending sheep! But God wanted someone with the heart of a shepherd. A heart that wanted to care for a flock, even in the face of physical danger.⁷¹ David had something in common with God: a shepherd's heart.⁷²

But there were other reasons why David was so loved by God. David was a man with a deep respect for God. He was fully dependent on God. Many times we can read that 'David enquired of the Lord.'⁷³ A life of total submission. David could have become king much sooner than he did. He could have seized power from Saul on several occasions, but he refused to grab authority.⁷⁴ He trusted God to fulfil his word at the right time, and in doing so he showed real integrity. In due course, he was invited to be king by both Judah and Israel.⁷⁵

Being secure in God, David didn't become king in just a political or military sense. No, he became a leader in both the spiritual and the cultural life of the nation. Under his government, art flourished. He reorganized the nation's worship and even set up music schools and invented new instruments.⁷⁶ There was a great flowering of

music and poetry. For David, there was no tension between sacred and secular: life was one and belonged to God. So he was able to compose, to sing and to dance in public.⁷⁷ The nation learned how to worship and celebrate properly. They got their feel for culture from David.

Even when David sinned, he was teachable. When reproved by the prophet Nathan, he sought genuine forgiveness, desiring 'truth in the inward being' (Psalm 51). When he wanted to build a temple for God he was willing to obey the Lord, who wished Solomon to build it.⁷⁸

David, a man after God's heart, was a prophetic artist. May he inspire us to be people after God's heart too! May more Davids arise!

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.⁷⁹*

The Psalms

Whatever David experienced was turned into song. Not only the heights but also the very depths are recorded. In fact, there is no area of David's life that is missing in his psalms. We find prophetic utterances, words of adoration, cries for help, expressions of grief, exhortations and much else in poetic form. Poetry set to contemporary music. Never a dull moment!

The secret of David's life was that he didn't make a distinction between the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the natural. Everything is God's and therefore everything is permeated by God. What a contrast to the attitude of Christians today! Life outside the church is a totally different dimension, a totally different world. We have learned to switch our behaviour from one to the other. This is not a biblical idea.

The times in which David lived were far more dangerous than ours. On many occasions he had to flee for his life. Yet he found himself secure in God.⁸⁰ The heights and the depths formed his character in God. He never stopped singing and being creative. Several psalms were written when he was on the run.⁸¹

So many people read the psalms because they can identify with the content. Every type of emotion is to be found in them, and this enables us to draw comfort and strength from them for our own personal situation.⁸²

But we can still write our own psalms today. We can be as creative as David was. The world around us can hear the things the Lord is doing for us today. It takes courage, though. The way David opened his heart in song, poetry and dance made him very vulnerable to criticism. But he wasn't afraid of that. His poetry was written originally for the Lord. The fact that we too are very blessed by it is just an added bonus.

This is the very attitude we need today. Brave artists, who dare to create from an attitude of worship, expressing suffering and expressing greatness. If something moves us, it is bound to move others as well. Therefore whatever it is that touches our lives needs to find expression in order to move others. Bringing out such treasures brings glory to God. How many of us have been blessed by David's psalms? What if he had hidden his talents? We would have been robbed. God would have been robbed. So, let us be bold and translate all that the Lord has given us into creative productivity! Because David was secure, he could create culture and form society. How desperately we need artists to express the reality of a broken world!

*Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.⁸³*

Everything new

Looking at the life of David, I was struck by the quality he radiated in everything he did. He was a great artist. His work still speaks to us today. In his psalms he exhorts us several times to sing a new song. He certainly did so in his time. All he did had the mark of newness and freshness. He was a bundle of life. Nothing stodgy or stale can be found in his life. It is easy to think: 'Good for David—but he was a man after God's heart. God probably blessed him more than anyone else. We can't expect such things to happen today.' Who says so? Did Jesus say that? No. He said that we would be able to do greater things than he did!⁸⁴ Why are we always trying to lower God's standards? Because we try to protect ourselves from looking like fools. We are afraid that when we take God at his word he may not back us up. What unbelief! This way, everything remains static. Nothing happens. Silence is the mark of death.

Look at nature: the moment life begins, it carries the seed for growth and multiplication. Life means movement. The moment we stop, we die. But in order to live we must do a few things. We need to breathe. We need to eat and drink.⁸⁵

It is the same when we are born again. It is no good giving testimonies about what happened some five or ten years ago. What matters is how we are doing today.⁸⁶ Has our life become static or stale? Or are we full of newness of life?⁸⁷ Many great masterpieces of art from the past were created by artists who were Christians and who had the mark of newness. Where are their successors today? Painters, writers, musicians... If God's Spirit really dwells in us, we cannot help but be alive and creative in this world.⁸⁸ His world.

The book of Acts fully illustrates this principle. The life of the Spirit means action.⁸⁹ Problems may occur. They are very likely to occur, because overcoming difficult situations with the help of God

only glorifies him even more.⁹⁰ Our lives are to be lived so that God can be glorified.⁹¹ What is impossible with mortals is possible with God.⁹²

If there is no freshness, no newness in our lives, in our churches, then something has gone terribly wrong. Did we go back on our decision to be a new creation? To be new every day? Faith is acting upon the revealed will of God.⁹³ Action is never static. Or have we fallen asleep? Perhaps we have reduced our 'Christian' life to the confirmation of a creed, rather than walking the way of a dynamic life.⁹⁴

No deformation, but creation. May God blow the dust out of our lives, so that everything can become new and so demonstrate to a broken world what it means to be renewed!⁹⁵ A renewal of life brings a renewal of life forms, a renaissance of art forms, a reformation of society.

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*⁹⁶

In his father's steps

It is a pity that David didn't see his son in action: he would have been proud of him. Like his father, Solomon was very creative. He also wrote songs; he knew more than a thousand, and also knew some three thousand proverbs.⁹⁷ God had enabled him according to his desire. When God wanted to know what Solomon wished for his life, his answer was 'Wisdom.'⁹⁸ God was well pleased with this desire, and gave him not only great wisdom but many other gifts as well. The kingdom Solomon built up was a showpiece. People came from all over the world to hear his wisdom and to see the glory of his kingdom.⁹⁹ When God blesses, the world soon finds out.

Solomon's kingdom was a paradise for artists. Nothing was denied to them in their expression of beauty. The finest of materials were available to them. Something to make us jealous! Yet Jesus tells us that even Solomon's glory cannot compare with the beauty of the lilies of the field.¹⁰⁰ What an astounding statement! Meditate on it. Solomon's kingdom must have been very impressive. Are we impressed in the same measure by lilies? Jesus is pointing us to other values here.

Solomon was a great king. He did great things. Yet all the beauty he created could not prevent him becoming inwardly ugly. His heart had grown proud. Solomon lost his dependence on God. He indulged himself by marrying many women—who brought their idols as well.¹⁰¹ How the Lord must have been grieved by it all! From later records we know that Solomon turned into a dictator, reigning with a heavy hand.¹⁰² What a contrast to his father!

The beauty of the lily comes from within. That is the sort of beauty Jesus refers to. Our lives are to radiate Christ in us. That makes us beautiful. It makes us people full of him, rather than

people preoccupied with ourselves. Being full of him saves us from idolatry.

Lilies don't need advertising. They speak for themselves. They show integrity, purity, beauty, character, dignity, truth and excitement. It will be no different today if we allow God to beautify our lives by his presence. May we walk in his steps, and let us meditate on the message of the lilies!

*'And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'*¹⁰³

The construction of the Temple

Sometimes we fail to appreciate what it took to build the Temple. Nothing was too expensive in order to build something so beautiful for God. Even the smallest details, even the cups, were beautiful. The Temple, with all its contents, was in its day perhaps the most expensive building ever built. No, Solomon was not at all mean in his heart towards God. His motivation comes through clearly in his statement: 'The temple I am going to build will be great, because our God is greater than all other gods. But who is able to build a temple for him, since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him?'¹⁰⁴

The Temple was assembled without the use of a hammer or chisel or any other iron tool.¹⁰⁵ What skill it must have taken! Those in charge must have been very gifted managers and extremely professional artists. It amazed me to read that the overall management was entrusted to a foreign artist, Hiram-Abi from Tyre. He had an Israelite mother but a non-Israelite father, something that should not have happened...¹⁰⁶ Yet God had obviously sent him. He was the artistic giant needed. Under his leadership an army of artists was at work. Hiram-Abi was full of wisdom and knowledge and had all the skills necessary to lead the artists and craftsmen in the proper way to attain the highest artistic standards.¹⁰⁷ Isn't this exactly what we need today to challenge a new artistic leadership? Great skills and gifts combined with wisdom and knowledge? This temple was something to be seen!

What about our buildings today? What are our motives when making great buildings or works of art? Will we ever rise above our search for cost-effectiveness? In order to cover up our artistic poverty, we tend to plaster our walls with pious Bible verses or

credos. There was no need for that in Solomon's temple. Its beauty was its witness.

The Lord sealed the Temple with his approval: he came and filled it.¹⁰⁸ What a glorious experience that must have been! The priests were unable to minister: God himself was in their midst! Wouldn't it be great if the Lord was pleased with our temples too? If he filled our buildings and works of art with his presence? He also came at Pentecost when the church prayed.¹⁰⁹ So, why not today?

Serving God requires a heart full of love for God. We need an eye for beauty. How drab our services and buildings have become! Perhaps it would be good to mull over the verses at the beginning of this chapter. For Solomon nothing was too beautiful where God was concerned. Nothing was too expensive. 'Our utmost for his highest'

May God give us leaders with abundant hearts! May the Lord raise up skilful people who know his character and serve him with their artistic talents! May we encourage one another to give our best to God! After the dedication of the Temple, the people returned home with joyful hearts.¹¹⁰ May our artistic products create the same hope in the hearts of our audience today!

And when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD,

'For he is good,

for his steadfast love endures for ever,'

the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.¹¹¹

Exciting prospects

There are two prophets in the Old Testament whose lives demonstrated a great variety of experience: Elijah and Elisha. They did the most exciting things. Elijah was fed by birds once, he guaranteed a widow that her tiny supply of flour and oil would never run out, he did the most challenging things at Mount Carmel, where he caused fire to rain down from heaven, to mention just a few of the many miracles he witnessed.¹¹² Elisha could claim many similar things in his life.¹¹³ He even raised a boy from the dead, like Elijah, and he fed many people from a small provision, just as Jesus fed several thousand from practically nothing.

Why were the lives of these two prophets so exciting? They responded in obedience to God's calling. They left their old lives to follow him unconditionally. The Lord always anoints people who respond to his calling. Our tasks may be different, but the God of Elijah and Elisha is our God too, and this leads us to similar exciting prospects.

Although the work of an artist may be entirely different to that of Elijah and Elisha, the same greatness of God is available to them if they follow the Lord in obedience. As with prophets, the work of an artist is by nature to reveal, to proclaim, to expose and to exhort. Being filled by the Spirit, an artist should be no less prophetic in his communication than Elijah and Elisha were. The work may be less spectacular, but it should still bear the same exciting marks. Different but still glorious!

In James 5:17 we are told that Elijah was a man just like us. Our ordinariness can therefore be no excuse for ducking the issue here! It is always the anointing that brings out the spectacular. Not in a glamorous way, nor in quietness. The Holy Spirit did not come

quietly at Pentecost, but that did not mean he was glamorous either.

Glamour seeks its own glory. God's works are not self-indulgent. Yet when God's works are manifested, we see the impossible become possible. Following God in obedience opens up a great perspective. It is written that Elijah was a man just like us, but when he prayed that it wouldn't rain, it didn't. This righteous man had power! Our works of art should be powerful and prophetic, created from a righteous heart. Isn't that what society needs today? Prophetic artists? Art that brings healing into the brokenness? Art that brings new faith, hope and glory? Art that reveals the unseen and brings life? Without this art, society will perish.

*Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.' Elisha said, 'Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.'*¹¹⁴

*The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.*¹¹⁵

Gehazi

It always amazes me when I read the story of Gehazi. One would think that living with a godly man like Elisha would have turned him into a prophet too. Didn't he have the right position? Wasn't he following a true prophet? Wasn't he serving God? Gehazi could have understood what it takes to be a prophet. He never did. How sad! I wonder why.

Elisha had been the servant of a prophet himself. Elijah had taken him under his wing, and Elisha had been eager to learn. At the end of his ministry, Elijah seemed to want Elisha to leave him, but Elisha wasn't fooled. He sensed that his master was about to depart and he wanted to be sure that the Spirit that rested on Elijah would be on him too. And in a double measure at that! This desire was to be fulfilled.¹¹⁶

Gehazi never showed any interest in his master's ministry. Not that he wasn't a faithful assistant, but he didn't look beyond his ministry to the One behind his master. When we read about the role Gehazi played, it becomes quite clear to us why. When the Shunamite woman who had been so good to his master came to Elisha in distress, Gehazi felt no sympathy for her. He showed her no compassion and even pushed her away, so that she wouldn't bother his master.¹¹⁷ When the woman told Elisha of the death of her son, who the Lord had given her through the prophet's mediation, he sent Gehazi with his staff to bring him back to life. When Gehazi touched the boy with the staff, nothing happened. Did he show real faith by falling down on his face and seeking the Lord himself? No, all he could do was run back to Elisha.¹¹⁸

Another story relates how a commander from Aram, Naaman, came to Elisha for healing at the instigation of an Israelite slave girl.¹¹⁹ When he was healed, Naaman wanted to reward Elisha, but

the prophet didn't want any of his presents or his money. Now Gehazi's heart was revealed. He was rather impressed by all the wealth he saw. He didn't mind having some of it. So, by deception, using his master's name, he obtained what he wanted. His greed became his downfall.¹²⁰

Gehazi had some status while serving Elisha, without having the qualities a prophet should have. His greed exposed him. He had an idolatrous heart. Artists and leaders should never act like him. We should never go for status as he did. We should wish to be like Elijah or Elisha. Gehazi disappears into obscurity behind the scenes of history. Elisha goes on with a double measure of power after receiving the mantle of Elijah. Where are the artists who will take up the prophet's mantle today?

*Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, thought, 'My master has let that Aramean Naaman off too lightly by not accepting from him what he offered. As the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something out of him.'*¹²¹

Be not afraid

'Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob." They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and the water gushed out.'¹²²

What a message to bring to a people enslaved in captivity! A people unable to be themselves, living in an environment totally repugnant to them. Babylon was a place associated with occultism, and a centre of wickedness. Such an environment blocks the free development of creativity. All we can do are the things we are told to do, whether we like it or not. Captivity doesn't allow freedom of choice. Captivity means a life of inferior quality, because quality is based on freedom of choice. Even if captors treat us well, the fact that we can't make our own choices spoils everything.

Art of freedom and harmony is not to be found in Babylon. Abraham had to leave it in ancient times and again the people have to leave. Why should people leave their Babylon today? Because Babylon means confusion. Babylon stands for all human 'isms', striving to achieve its own greatness, secure its own salvation, decide its own future. Babylon stands for the flesh rather than the Spirit of God. Babylon stands for 'the dark side' of power. The thinking behind Babylon is enslaving humankind because of its negative attitudes, ideas and goals. How beautiful to read that at the end of time God will destroy Babylon and its corruption of human nature and humankind!¹²³

Leaving Babylon doesn't mean leaving this world and escaping to the moon. We will still live in this world but will no longer be in bondage to its spirit, its thought and its cultural assumptions. So let us arise and create new works and forms and movements of art

based on eternal values and ethics, filled with the Spirit of harmony, beauty, truth and dignity!

We may be living in a free world today but many of us live in captivity. Many people dare not be free agents. They may be afraid of losing their subsidies or they may be afraid of being rejected by art critics &c. Public opinion is a very powerful captor which imprisons many artists. Yet the Lord has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.¹²⁴ Just as the Lord told the Israelites to flee Babylon and the Babylonians, we should flee situations and people who try to keep us in bondage. Jesus has made us free in the fullest sense of the word.¹²⁵ Free to express what is within us. Why should artists be afraid to admit that their inspiration has come from God? Should they depend on being accepted by the world? Rejection by the world shouldn't make us timid.¹²⁶ In fact, it should encourage us to show freshness, newness and greatness.

As they fled, the Israelites would find that God provided for them in their hour of need. His provision would be abundant. Those who flee from bondage today may find the same resources available to them in God. The Devil will try everything to keep us in bondage, with intimidation as his main weapon. But Jesus has delivered us from the Devil's grip. We have no excuse to remain in bondage. Jesus is the way out. So, don't be afraid to rise up! A whole culture is waiting for us!

*This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that conquers the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*¹²⁷

Power to influence

'Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."¹²⁸

Jeremiah's ministry was not all that desirable. Uprooting and overthrowing things don't make you very popular. But this ministry was necessary and Jeremiah's words were powerful, because they were God's words. Uprooting and overthrowing were required because God wanted something new. He wanted to build and to plant as well.

What a contrast we see in our modern-day revolutions! There is plenty of destruction, but where are the building and the planting? Many people are suffering under revolutions without gaining anything. There seems to be a philosophy that believes that beauty can only come through a process of destruction. This pattern of thought can also be observed in the art world. Values have become decadent and very negative. Where are the new and fresh developments? Where is the vision of a new society?

If these prophets of destruction were sent by God, we could expect a time of building-up at some point. Yes, God wants the destruction of all that is evil and sinful—but that should lead to a new beginning in God. It should enable people to blossom again. Jeremiah's ultimate goal was not negative. His ministry was meant to lead people back to God. Reading the book of Jeremiah shows that all the destruction could have been avoided if the people had heeded the prophet's message.

Heeding the word of the Lord provides Christian artists with the ability to uproot and overthrow all the negative values the world proclaims. They can have a ministry similar to Jeremiah's.

They too will be able not just to destroy but also to create. So often we underestimate the power artists have over society. When God touches our mouths, our paintbrushes and our pens, we can destroy the works of the Devil. When we really believe the power of the Lord's prayer, to bring about his kingdom on this earth, we can expose the nature of the Evil One. We can also plant pure values in the hearts and minds of many nations.

Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.¹²⁹

Developing new land

The Lord gave his people a fertile land 'to eat its fruit and rich produce'—but in spite of all the blessings they received from God their Father they despised him and looked for guidance from Baal.¹³⁰ Unbelievable! How could such a situation develop? We only have to consider the situation today to understand what had happened. Even in our own generation we can witness a development not unlike what happened to the people of Israel.

Whenever we see idolatry we know that those involved are drinking from the wrong source. God can only be worshipped from a pure source: himself. Obviously, the people of Israel had not become less religious. They still wanted to find out about the future. They still had a need to worship. But their sense of direction had gone. The Lord complained that they strayed away from him.¹³¹ Isn't this similar to what we see happening around us today? Plenty of religion and plenty of prophets with plenty of followers—but which god is followed? If Jesus is not at the centre of it all, the answer is plain: a false god. And deception brings only destruction. Yet these false gods seem to be shaping our society, our culture, our education and our science.

Although the prophet Jeremiah is often associated with doom and gloom, he still proclaims hope. In chapter 3 the Lord calls people to repent and return to him.¹³² There is always an open door for those who turn to God in repentance. That is why when we see a decadent society we should never give up hope and merely condemn it.

If we want people to seek the Lord again, we must believe that he can change our land full of thistles and thorns into a fertile land again. In his name we can clear the stones from the soil so that it becomes receptive to the good seed. We can start by clearly

living the life God has given us, by putting him at the centre of everything. Renaissance, reformation, revival does not come from structures: it is only genuine when it starts in us and through us. Change must first come in us, in our goals, our attitudes and the way we express ourselves.

Living our lives for God means that we can be free from selfishness. We can give ourselves to blessing others. We can pray for others. We have the privilege of believing and doing righteousness. The Lord is by nature a giver. He wants us to be like sons and daughters and to give us desirable land.¹³³ Is your society full of thorns and thistles, full of hard stones? God has given you a mandate for land development. If you give yourself to him and seek the good of others, God will give you his blessing. Never stop praying for your nation! Call for repentance! Proclaim the Truth!

*'Has a nation changed its gods,
even though they are no gods?
But my people have changed their glory
for something that does not profit.
Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
be shocked, be utterly desolate,
says the LORD,
for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living water,
and dug out cisterns for themselves,
cracked cisterns
that can hold no water.'*¹³⁴

Minor prophets?

It is a human tendency to put labels on people. We have got used to the terms 'major' and 'minor' when we study the prophets. The Lord never makes such a distinction. The message of each of the prophets contains the word of the Lord: its content expresses God himself.¹³⁵ None of them is greater than another.

We also label ourselves and those around us. Looking at the great names, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel &c, makes the timid among us think that we have no role to play on the prophetic scene. But who said that these 'great' prophets saw themselves as great? Were they great? What gave them their quality? Or, rather, who gave them their quality?

Look at the disciples, who were later sent out as apostles. Were they great? We all know about their failures and their lack of comprehension. What changed them? The Holy Spirit, and the understanding he gave them of their ministry. Most of us are familiar with the principle 'not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit' in Zechariah 4:6. That rules out human factors. Our mental ability plays no part in whether we are prophetic or not.

So, when we know that we can fulfil our godly task in life only by the grace of God, we have no excuse for opting out. In the New Testament many verses are quoted from the 'minor' prophets.¹³⁶ They had the privilege of prophesying New Testament truth. Being baptized in the Holy Spirit and continually walking in the Spirit make us just as effective in fulfilling and proclaiming prophetic truth today. So, let all the 'minor' prophets come out of their hiding places and let them proclaim!

Whoever we are, whatever our gifts, we are called upon to give expression to what God has given us. We are not to label some as great and others as small—or, worse, not acknowledge them at

all! To God everything has value. So, we too should respect those around us with even the most 'minor' gifts. God is only concerned with one thing: that we fulfil the task he gives us to do and play our part in his pattern. Obedience makes us precious through and through, obedience from a loving heart.¹³⁷

We should stop merely supporting the 'big names' in ministry and neglecting the less-known. The Levites had to be given the same support as the priests.¹³⁸ Everyone in the Kingdom of God needs encouragement or support, and often both. A church overflowing in giving encouragement to all is a strong church.

*Look! On the mountains the feet of one
who brings good tidings,
who proclaims peace!*

*Celebrate your festivals, O Judah,
fulfil your vows,
for never again shall the wicked invade you;
they are utterly cut off.¹³⁹*

Revival and the arts

The second book of Chronicles records several revivals. We can read about King Asa who led his people back to worshipping God.¹⁴⁰ His son Jehoshaphat continued to do so and there was great blessing.¹⁴¹ We can also read about revivals under the kings Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah.¹⁴² And all these revivals had one thing in common: when there was a spiritual revival, the arts blossomed as well. The Levites, who were musicians and singers, were restored in leading the people in worship. The Temple was restored, which involved plenty of artistic skill. Where the Spirit of God moved, creativity flourished.

We can see similar trends at the beginning of the Renaissance. Men, being the creation of God, gained in stature and found artistic ways in which to express themselves. Initially, the Renaissance was based on spiritual values. Human dignity blossomed further under the Reformation, and a wonderful climate for artists developed. We still enjoy the fruits of their labour today, but it is a pity that many art historians fail to acknowledge the spiritual aspects of the Renaissance.

Later revivals have never succeeded in penetrating the whole of cultural life as the Renaissance and the Reformation did. Revivals in the United States and Britain have so often been limited to the life of the church rather than changing the whole culture. Still, we should not ignore the great impetus for social change that ensued, which led to the introduction of reasonable working hours, the regulation of child labour and improvements in the status of women &c.

Looking back over history, we can see that up until the 17th century no distinction was made between the secular and the sacred (the Christian life). Subsequently they became separated.

Support for artists diminished accordingly and the development of the arts was left in the hands of the secular world, and so its fruits were secular in character. We should not be surprised to see the tragic results around us.

May God visit us with a great revival again! We can prepare the ground by cleansing our lives of everything that would hinder it. Sanctification is something we can initiate. May such a revival involve a full development of the arts! May churches encourage the gifted among them! Art in the hands of worshipping Christians will be majestic. It will draw the world's attention to their Maker. Revival and flourishing art go hand in hand. Just as the early Renaissance broke ground for the Reformation, let our artists arise in a new renaissance to break the resistance—of those who don't want either renaissance or reformation—so that God can reform us anew!

*Jehu son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, 'Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the LORD.'*¹⁴³

Leading artists

When fighting a battle, the last thing we should do is to put musicians in front of the army. That would be utter folly. What can they do to defend themselves against the attack of the enemy? This is a perfectly healthy argument, humanly speaking. Yet there are several occasions in the Bible where this was done. How stupid it seems!

Joshua asked priests to go in front playing trumpets when the Israelites walked around Jericho.¹⁴⁴ Jehoshaphat had men singing in front of the army, praising the Lord.¹⁴⁵ Abijah did a similar thing when he said, 'God is with us. He is our leader. His priests with their trumpets will sound the battle cry.'¹⁴⁶

Why would anyone do such a foolish thing? Why put defenceless people in such a dangerous position? Because it expressed the fact that the Lord was their Leader. It was his fight. The musicians and singers gave expression to their faith. They were proclaimers. They announced God's victory. What church would give a leading role to artists today?

Oh, that churches understood the importance of artistic expression in worship! So often they are conservative and are not open to artistic experiments or new forms of expression. How many blessings they miss! How much more difficult it becomes to reach our generation, or to make any sense to contemporary culture! So often Christian artists get a pat on the back with a remark like 'It's very nice what you're doing—but why don't you look for a proper job?' Partly people say this because they don't understand art. It isn't always essential that we understand every work of art, for in the first instance artists are creating for God and so it is something between them and God. But church leaders can create a climate by giving their full moral support to the artists in their congregations.

The Lord appreciates artistic expression. The Bible gives us plenty of examples. Art has its own role to play. Art is not a disease to be avoided. Creativity is not sinful. Creativity glorifies the Creator. Worship is beautified when artists are given their proper place. Spiritual warfare is intensified and is successful when artists lead the way. Psalm 149 is a perfect illustration of this principle.

We often have a utilitarian view of God. Things have to be useful and efficient. So often we see beauty as a waste. But God loves beauty. We can never waste anything for God. Artists may not be seen as useful, but they are essential for creating beauty. They are indispensable in God's view! They put the enemy to flight. They proclaim God's victory and truth over the ugliness of the Evil One. So, let's give artists their proper place and function!

*May the praise of God be in their mouths
and a double-edged sword in their hands,
to inflict vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,
to bind their kings with fetters,
their nobles with shackles of iron,
to carry out the sentence written against them.¹⁴⁷*

No restoration without purification

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah make fascinating reading. They contain many great lessons for us today. We can read how the Lord appointed both of these prophets to lead his people back from captivity into their own land. This process would not be complete until the centre for worship had been restored: Jerusalem and the Temple.

Despite the fact that the Israelites had obtained full permission for this work from the highest authorities, and had everything they needed for it, things were not at all easy.¹⁴⁸ Their return meant a loss of territory to those who had taken their land during their captivity. They were not welcome in their own country. They faced overt opposition, slander, blackmail and bribery.¹⁴⁹ The enemy even suggested co-operation with a view to undermining and destroying the work they were doing. Tricky. When the work was completed, we might think that the Israelites could start living their own lives and resume worshipping God just like that. But no, during their captivity and then during the period of restoration, people had defiled themselves in various ways. Mixed marriages had taken place. So, Nehemiah called on the Levites to purify themselves so that they could guard the gates and keep the Sabbath holy.¹⁵⁰ All the beautiful things that had been achieved, including the joyful worship full of colour and song and dance, would be endangered if the gates were not watched by purified people. People who were able to discern what was impure.

Doesn't this story make your heart beat faster? Hasn't our culture been captivated by the enemy? A culture that should be under God's authority? We too are called to restore things under Christ's authority.

That is the essence of gospel preaching. Just as in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, we need to pray while building the walls, fully armed in the Spirit. We also need to be instructed in the word of God as Ezra and Nehemiah instructed the people. We also need to discern the wiles of the Devil. And, having done all that, we have to see to it that purity is achieved and maintained continually.

The moment we fail to watch the gates, the enemy will move in. Ezra and Nehemiah could do their work because people supported it fully.¹⁵¹ They not only gave their tithes, they also fulfilled the role each had to play. May artists fight the myth that has captured our culture today, that everything is neutral! Objects are neutral; life never is. Bob Dylan rightly sings, 'You've got to serve somebody.' There's no such thing as 'art for art's sake'. That is plain deception. Art conveys something, and so it's never neutral.

When Aaron created the Golden Calf, he abused art.¹⁵² When we go along with the trends of the secular world, we abuse art. The world's beauty is a negative beauty when it doesn't speak of truth. It doesn't lead to worshipping God. It will always reflect the character of its origin: Lucifer. Negative beauty always has a sting in its tail. Art reflects a reality, and when that reality is not derived from God it will end up in deception, in a lie.

Artists need to purify themselves. They need to be free from selfish ambition, from self-centredness, from jealousy, rivalry and insincerity. Only then is art safe in their hands. Only then can they guard the gates. It will take determination, as Nehemiah was determined. It will take boldness, never losing sight of our vision. The Levites were called to guard the gates. Today our artists should rise up and hold the gates of civilization. Restoring beauty, proclaiming truth, challenging every other Christian to stand up and rebuild in their own location, in their own profession, the eternal values of God: preparing his kingdom.

*Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.*¹⁵³

The paralysing effect of fear

If one thing stands in the way of creative expression, it is fear.

Apparently the Bible contains 365 exhortations not to fear, one for each day of the year! It is recorded many times in the Bible that when God sent a messenger to someone, their first reaction was fear and so the messenger had to restore the relationship by telling them not to be afraid.¹⁵⁴ A fearful person is not in a state to take in the information they are given. Fear diminishes our ability to receive and to give. Fear undermines confidence.

Fear often leads us to wrong conclusions. Think about Saul's fear of David, though David had no ill intentions at all towards him. Saul's fear destroyed their relationship in the end. Fear is a very negative emotion. It imprisons us. It leads to slavery.¹⁵⁵

Jesus came so that we could serve him without fear.¹⁵⁶ If we remain fearful we will be useless soldiers in the Kingdom of God. Some are afraid of the Devil, others of hell—despite the fact that we know there is nothing to fear in Christ. Some are even afraid of God, because they don't really believe that he loves them. How fear robs us of any joy we may have! Fear turns everything into hell.

If the Lord exhorts us not to be afraid, we'd better be obedient! Fear doesn't glorify God. If we are fearful, we need to confess it and ask for deliverance. We are unable to deal with fear ourselves, but Jesus is able to deliver us from it. His Spirit casts out every fear.¹⁵⁷

Why is it so important that we don't fear? Fear blocks every expression of creativity. We can only fully develop ourselves in Christ if we are full of faith, which is another word for confidence. Confidence in God. Faith believes; fear doubts. Nothing beautiful can be created in a state of doubt. That is why we shouldn't try to ignore our fears, pretending they don't exist. We will always be tempted to fear.¹⁵⁸ The antidote is not to fear, having faith in God

who can keep our hearts from fear, creating in us a serenity that is still open to amazement, excitement and fulfilment.

We must not confuse this negative form of fear with the fear of God. In this context, 'fear' basically means 'reverence', 'respect' or 'honour'.¹⁵⁹ Being respectful heightens our ability to be creative. It means that we have a proper perspective on our Creator. Paying respect brings glory to the person we respect. Respect improves the quality of any relationship. Negative fear destroys relationships and paralyses any creative ability.

*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*¹⁶⁰

Lucifer

Reading the account of Lucifer's fall in the book of Ezekiel, it always amazes me that he could not be satisfied with all he had.¹⁶¹ Lucifer was beautiful, perfect, wise, blameless, anointed by God. Yet, having been adorned with all these gifts, he became proud. This very pride robbed him of everything. It became his downfall.

The nature of God's kingdom is one of selfless love. There is no room for selfish ambition. Therefore Lucifer couldn't stay in God's presence. He was out of place. And, being rejected, he developed a strong hate and a longing for revenge. He wanted to receive all the worship God received. So, when God created humankind to worship him, they were automatically coveted by Lucifer. He wanted their worship too.

The Bible gives us plenty of examples of how Lucifer tries to win people over to himself. He uses all sorts of weapons: half truths, lies, deception, seduction, accusation, intimidation, manipulation &c. If these tactics fail, he may try to flatter us by suggesting that we don't really need God. In fact, he may suggest that we are gods ourselves and God is just very mean not to tell us! Lucifer likes us to believe that God is being selfish, wanting all the power and knowledge for himself. That he has an ulterior motive in keeping these things from us. Nothing is further from the truth. When Jesus gave himself to a horrible death for us it was an act of self-sacrifice. There is nothing selfish in that!

Wherever Lucifer gains ground, standards deteriorate. His character soon develops in his followers: selfish ambition, greed, self-centredness and pride. Following Lucifer also means separation from God. It means death. Look around to see its marks in society! When people fall into deception, they become blind to the character of God. How important it is therefore that our lives

demonstrate truth, for Jesus says that truth makes us free.¹⁶² Jesus came to destroy the works of the Devil.¹⁶³ So can we.

Being followers of Christ, we can receive the same anointing that Lucifer had before his fall. An anointing that reflects God's beauty and truth. An anointing that unmasks anything that isn't beautiful and truthful, so that the wicked works of the Evil One are exposed.¹⁶⁴ May God's anointing flow to restore a broken world! We will not serve any form of deception any more. By the Spirit of God, we take dominion.

*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*¹⁶⁵

Creative communication

The Bible provides us with a very colourful picture of how the Lord communicated his message. He did so in the most creative ways. He asked his prophets to wear a belt, carry a yoke, employ a potter, bury stones under the pavement of Pharaoh's palace, throw a book in the river Euphrates, lay siege to a brick model of Jerusalem, cut their hair and burn it, cut a hole in a wall of their home, be silent for a long period of time, marry a prostitute and write down their visions, just to mention a few!¹⁶⁶ The Lord provided visual aids in order to get his message across.

Sometimes music was involved to encourage the Lord's word to come through. Elijah asked for music while waiting for God to speak.¹⁶⁷ Trumpets were instrumental in the fall of Jericho.¹⁶⁸ David's harp soothed Saul.¹⁶⁹ These are just a handful of examples of how music too played a vital part in God's way of communication.

Reflecting on the important role of art in the Bible, I wonder how things are today. Jesus was very creative in the way he communicated by telling stories. The prophet Agabus used a belt to illustrate the word of the Lord for Paul.¹⁷⁰ So, how are we doing today? Are we also creative in communicating what the Lord is doing now?

Some churches are starting to use drama to illustrate a message, or poetry. This is great, but it is only a small beginning. Communicating the word of God is still mainly done through the medium of sermons or Bible studies. Yet artists can greatly complement these forms of communication in very effective ways. Paul exhorts us in Ephesians 5:18–20 to be creative. Being filled with the Spirit inevitably means being creative in worship. (And that passage in Ephesians makes it clear that a church service should never be a one-man show!)

It may be good, when you read about the way the prophets had to communicate from time to time, to put yourself in the shoes of their audience. Would you have understood their message? What effect would their action have had on you? Seeing a prophet doing something strange like carrying a yoke would certainly make you think. That is the whole purpose of the exercise: it makes you think. That's why communication has to be creative!

For too long we have thought too little about art and art forms. And because churches didn't give the arts their proper place, they became of no importance. So many people with creative gifts ended up in a kind of ghetto. What a tragedy! Just as speaking is an art form suitable for proclamation, so every art form has its own power to speak, show and reveal truth. Artists should once again be the shapers of culture. The Christians should once again be the avant-garde, to bind or to release. Out of struggle and pain will come the victory that reclaims the promised land. A promised land awaits us, but we won't get there without struggle and pain and a reform of society. Out of perseverance and pain great works of art will be born. For if we prevail, the different art forms will have gained authority and eloquence, to express and radiate the truth. How much we need a new breed of profound, creative thinkers!

And every stroke of the staff of punishment that the LORD lays upon him will be to the sound of timbrels and lyres; battling with brandished arm he will fight with him.¹⁷¹

The earth belongs to God

The scriptures are clear about it: 'The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.'¹⁷² Do we believe that? If we do, then why do we tend to divide the world into the secular and the sacred? As if the one were totally divorced from the other!

This type of reasoning is very deceptive. It allows the Devil to claim the secular as his territory, just because Christians have withdrawn into their holy huddles! It is not biblical to do so. Jesus prayed in John 17:15–18 that the Father would send his disciples into the world. If Christians fail to go there, the ground will soon be taken from us by our enemy. We are supposed to stand our ground, so that the enemy cannot gain territory.¹⁷³

The earth is the Lord's. We are supposed to live this fact. It means that we take our place in commerce, in industry, in education, in politics and in the arts. It also means that we stop complaining and compromising. Criticism never builds anyone up, particularly if that criticism comes from those who don't even participate in life! Society can only improve when there is hope, glory, dreams, goals, vision and faith.

Yes, we can live in this world without being of this world. History proves that this is not always understood. Segregation illustrates this. Sadly, more and more ghettos are coming into being, bringing together those of like mind. Their demand is uniformity. That is their security. Everything different becomes suspect. How sad! The Lord has never looked for uniformity, but for unity. That is altogether different. Real love makes diversity possible. How often have I seen talented artists disappear into one of these ghettos! At first they are received as stars, but soon they

lose their glitter. Why? Because there is no room for creativity in uniformity.

Knowing that 'the earth is the LORD's and everything in it' should inspire us to bring life around us into line with this great truth. May it make us, who are salt and light, bold to proclaim God's claim on this world!¹⁷⁴ When this truth penetrates hearts around us, standards will rise. If this truth is rejected, it is no longer our responsibility—but people will have no excuse before God, for they will have heard and seen the truth in those who have stood their ground in the Lord! The earth belongs to God. 'Thy kingdom come ... on earth as it is in heaven.'

*'I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.'*¹⁷⁵

The art of being priests

We often tend to associate the word 'priest' with an élite leadership. Indeed, this was the case in the Old Testament, where the priesthood was reserved for a select few. However, in the New Testament the priesthood is given to all believers. It no longer belongs to a select few! The mark of a priest is that they are a mediator. Priests mediate the character of God to the people and they bring the needs of people before God as an advocate. In other words, they do not live for themselves but for the other, with God at the centre of things. The moment God's priests stop serving God, they cease to be priests, even though they may keep up an outward appearance. Being priests gives us great privileges.¹⁷⁶ What a glory that we can mediate God to this world! What a blessing that we can lead others into worshipping him! What a majestic authority!

Perhaps this truth has never really sunk into our hearts. So, let's take a look at what Peter says about our priesthood: 'As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God ... Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.'¹⁷⁷

This is royal art indeed! How precious! Kingship and true majesty, for it also says in Revelation 20:6: 'They will be priests

of God and of Christ and will reign with him.' Who says that the Christian life is a dull one? If yours is, then something is wrong!

Being priests puts a lot of responsibility upon us. The task can only be fulfilled if we are walking very close to God.¹⁷⁸ If we fail to worship him, we will lead people into destruction. But if we walk in obedience to our loving God, nothing will be impossible. Priests are leaders. They can open the windows of heaven. Through loving their neighbours as themselves they can unlock many hearts and release people into wholeness and creativity.¹⁷⁹ In this way, God's people will become like the crown jewels.¹⁸⁰ A precious understanding of life will produce new values, new greatness and a new royal nation. What a message for the bruised and broken, the poor and the suffering!¹⁸¹ True kingdom art! Taking up the challenge makes us part of it.

*For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.*¹⁸²

What are our treasures?

The Wise Men went through a lot of trouble to find the king of the Jews.¹⁸³ 'We have come to worship him,' they said. Obviously, they expected the hierarchy to know about this birth, but no, they met with total ignorance. King Herod thought that the story was a little unlikely. But suppose it was true? His position might be in danger! Another king?! The thought of worshipping this newborn king didn't enter his mind, though he pretended otherwise.

Finally the Wise Men found the king of the Jews, Jesus. They were overjoyed! Out came precious gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Very expensive. They must have been very sure that Jesus was a king. Why else would they go to all that trouble and spend all that money? They brought honour where honour was due.

What is our attitude to Jesus? Do we respect him in the same way? How much do we give him? Do we give him anything at all? How many among us seem to offer Jesus only long shopping lists of requests? These men were called 'wise'. They discerned who the person was they worshipped.

Some people feel they have nothing to offer. Is the Holy Spirit empty-handed? Those who have come to worship God will always find his provision ready for an offering. In the same way, Abraham was provided with a ram when he was willing to sacrifice Isaac.¹⁸⁴ No, having nothing to offer is a very poor excuse! It shows a mean attitude towards God. We can offer our experience of daily living at least.

Others are gifted and want to give to God, but they're afraid. Afraid of rejection. Rejection is very painful, but how likely is it that God will reject a gift from a loving heart? Being afraid of rejection reveals a deep insecurity and brings anything but honour to the one who is supposed to receive! It implies that the recipient would

not be loving towards the giver. I'm sure no one would wish to accuse our Lord of lack of love!

May our hearts have the same diligence and the same warmth that the Wise Men had towards Jesus! May we bring out our treasures to honour the One who deserves our all! God wants us to offer our treasures freely, of our own accord. We can be so vulnerable before God. In his presence we can open up the most secret places of our lives, our visions and our dreams, and he accepts them as they are. He respects every gift.

This acceptance gives us room to blossom and grow. Do we show the same attitude towards others? Do we respect them and their gifts? So many Christians show respect to celebrities like Billy Graham, Luis Palau, Loren Cunningham, Jimmy Owens, Barry McGuire and Amy Grant—but how about Sister Johnson who has the gift of making coffee?

If we give respect to even the smallest gift, then what is of real value will come to the light.¹⁸⁵ For in this environment of respect, everybody will unlock their treasures. How beautiful and full of creativity the community will become!

*From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*¹⁸⁶

Jesus displayed creativity

Listening to evangelists today, we may wonder how many have appreciated the creativity with which Jesus expressed the gospel. It seems that most oratory in the West is based on a systematic expounding of some truth, which requires almost an academic degree to grasp it! Not so with Jesus.

Jesus was a man who understood the minds of people in the Middle East. Factual truth, such as we treasure in the West, has never been so important in other cultures. Imagination is what matters there. And to feed the imagination requires creativity. Good storytellers are always greatly appreciated in such cultures. They are the ones who become famous. They influence their culture most powerfully. How something is said is often more valued than what is being said.

Jesus was able to combine both elements: He expressed factual truth in the form of good stories. Stories help people to visualize the message, which in turn helps to make it memorable. They also illustrate it in a way that explains it. Stories make the meaning obvious, unless their content is foreign to their hearers' worldview. The way Jesus told his stories showed great insight into the ability of people to receive truth. Those who didn't understand his message were those who were deaf to truth anyway.¹⁸⁷

We can learn a lot today from the way Jesus interacted with the people about him. Some of his parables are paintings done in words, others are flashes of imagination, some are almost like film scripts, others are great short stories or novels. He identified with his hearers, using examples they could understand, which showed that he had observed things around him in order to use them as illustrations. And if we want to convey something to the people around us, we need to do the same. We need to use their

environment creatively, looking for ways to make sense of the gospel for them.

If we understand this principle of creative communication, what an encouragement this must be for the creative among us! There is so much scope to communicate truth in many different forms of artistic expression. If only every church member could see how many possibilities there are! Let us be open to understand Jesus the artist, and learn from him! Jesus was not afraid to use contemporary forms of communication. Nor should we be. May we be full of the same creative Spirit of God!

Then [Jesus] said, 'Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.'¹⁸⁸

The art of living

It almost seems that being a Christian means being very serious. Our church services tend to be rather solemn, particularly when we are having a communion service. Preachers seem to major on how lost humankind is, so we must give all we can to snatch a few from the fire. No wonder some of us are going under in nervous breakdowns, being workaholics in the Kingdom of God!

What is lacking in such an attitude is balance. Looking at the life of Jesus, the greatest preacher there ever was, we can see that he had times for rest and relaxation.¹⁸⁹ His contemporaries even despised him for the way he spent his 'free' time. Parties with tax collectors, enjoying food and drink... He didn't fast and didn't pray long enough, according to the standards of the religious people. Jesus would probably not be welcome in some of our churches if he were around today!

Jesus never wants to spoil fun. He didn't object to changing water into wine so that people could enjoy a wedding feast.¹⁹⁰ A wedding is often used as an illustration of the Kingdom of God. Hardly a gloomy thing! We so often overstress the negative. Most of us can quote from the book of Ecclesiastes that 'everything is meaningless.' But how many of us can quote the verse: 'I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live?'¹⁹¹ Or 'So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad?'¹⁹² Not to mention the beautiful theme of the Song of Songs. A song of appreciation and love in its fullest sense.

The life of a Christian is a harmony of the serious and the pleasant things in life. A lack of balance means a failure to know the fullness of God. How can we ever hope to bring people to know God if knowing him means being gloomy all the time? What a

misrepresentation of God! Having been freed from sin, we should live out the beauty of our new life in God, or how else will the world know how beautiful that new life can be? All that the world learns from over-serious Christians is that they are not allowed to drink, not allowed to go to the cinema &c. What a miserable message!

We learn the art of living by being in harmony with God.¹⁹³ Then we don't need to live in a cramp of dos and don'ts. We will be interested in the lives of others, whether they are prostitutes or drunks. We will see them with the eyes of God, seeing their potential in Christ. Then we can relax and have a good time with non-Christians. Our harmony with Christ gives us all the security we need. So, let's live!

*'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'*¹⁹⁴

Free to enjoy

In the last chapter we learned that it isn't wrong to enjoy ourselves. Having said that, I would like to look at this question a little closer. So often we are driven people, workaholics, afraid of having a good time. Why? What stands in the way? Perhaps the answer is simple: anxiety. In order to enjoy something we have to be free. Free from ourselves, free from our worries, free from threatening situations. Being afraid leaves us no time to appreciate things. Our minds are preoccupied.

Jesus spent a lot of time encouraging his followers not to be afraid. First of all, he wants us to be like children.¹⁹⁵ That is somewhat humiliating. It means we have to be dependent. But children trust. They are not bogged down by worry—they know that their father can solve their problems. Coming into the Kingdom of God requires us to be like children. It is a kingdom of trust.

Secondly, Jesus shows in his teaching that he is fully aware of our inability to deal with situations too big for us. In the midst of such situations he tells us to be shrewd like snakes but also innocent like doves.¹⁹⁶ Again, no reason to worry! Whatever our situation may be, there is no excuse for losing our inner peace. We need to depend on Jesus.¹⁹⁷

Do you see how being fully dependent on God makes us free to enjoy everything? In both Deuteronomy 6:2 and Ephesians 6:3 the enjoyment of long life is related to obedience to God. A long life can't be enjoyed if it's miserable! In fact, enjoying things is a great way to bring honour to God. There is so much to enjoy: blessings, gifts, talents—and also struggles, because these bring forth fruit in our lives, such as perseverance. Enjoyment has everything to do with appreciation.

Think about the meaning of 'Emmanuel'! God is with us, not against us. How much we can enjoy this support! Come to think of it, how many times are we exhorted to show the Lord our thankfulness? Too many times to record here! Yet this is the very thing that illustrates how we are to enjoy life, for enjoyment is the result of thankfulness.

Being free to enjoy things means that we can be obedient to Paul's exhortation in Philippians 4:8: 'Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.' How can we do this if we are full of anxiety?¹⁹⁸ Being free to enjoy opens our eyes to all the beauty of creativity and helps us to become creative.

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.¹⁹⁹

Human dignity

If Jesus had lived among us today, he would certainly have been criticized for his social behaviour, just as he was criticized by the religious leaders in his day. He seemed to care nothing for their rules of social interaction. Surely he should have known better if he was a prophet as the people claimed him to be. Instead, he spent little time joining the Pharisees in their exhibitions of fasting and praying, and he spent far too much time with the wrong sort of people. He showed no discretion!

In all their religious zeal these leaders had forgotten the message of Isaiah about the coming Messiah.²⁰⁰ They had forgotten that the Messiah was to be particularly interested in setting captives free and giving sight to the blind—not to mention the lame and the broken-hearted! In other words, the Messiah was going to be interested in the failures of this world, the 'have-nots'.²⁰¹

The whole life of Jesus on earth demonstrated that he valued every living being. Everyone had their dignity. The Samaritan woman was treated with respect.²⁰² The woman caught in adultery was restored to dignity.²⁰³ Jesus never trampled on anyone. He once told a parable about a lost son.²⁰⁴ The story illustrates how God honours everyone who comes to him. When the son returned, he was given new clothes and a ring. His dignity and authority were restored immediately.

On several occasions Jesus clearly demonstrated that he didn't like the self-righteous behaviour of the religious leaders of his day. He called them 'blind'.²⁰⁵ They were always ready to condemn. Jesus told them to have compassion.²⁰⁶ He said that mercy should triumph over judgement.

It is easy to condemn the behaviour of these leaders without realizing that we often behave in the same way ourselves. How

quick we are to judge and condemn! Yet if we learn to treat people with dignity, we can open up a whole life of creativity. Restored, people can give themselves fully to building the Kingdom of God. God often builds his kingdom on rejects. Never give up on anyone! God always gives people a second chance. He also gives our society a second chance. Its life is not yet spent. It is not a disease to be avoided. Luther supposedly said: 'If the Lord comes tomorrow, I will plant an apple tree today!' Let's have the same faith: not giving up on anyone or anything!

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.²⁰⁷

The law of leaven or the law of freedom?

Reading the New Testament, one can't help but notice that Jesus often had a bone to pick with the religious leaders of his day. The Pharisees were a strictly conservative lot, and the Sadducees were equally zealous in their liberal theology. Both groups had one thing in common: they loved rules and regulations.

Rules and regulations have never been God's goal. Rather, they were to guide the people in Old Testament times into a relationship with God through the mediation of the priesthood. Sadly, it comes naturally to us to find our security in a dependence on rules, as if by keeping them we could please God. But even in the Old Testament God treasured a warm heart more than any outward obedience to his law.

Just as Jesus reacted sharply against the legalistic attitudes of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees, so we have to be vigilant about our attitudes today.²⁰⁸ Jesus called the teaching of these groups 'leaven', which is another word for yeast. Yeast acts like an infection. When even a little is added to a batch of dough, the whole lump is affected. It is this infection that Jesus objects to. Preaching legalism leads to subjugation, not submission. Legalism tends to forbid rather than proclaim. People with a legalistic mind are always on the lookout to see if something is out of line. Such an attitude produces fear. Fear of doing things wrong.

We don't need to live under the law of leaven, of compulsion. Jesus came because he wanted us to serve him without fear.²⁰⁹ He emphasizes mercy and love.²¹⁰ The Bible is full of examples of God deviating from set patterns. Where would the Ruths and the Rahabs be if this wasn't so? But in real life, there are often many 'rules' that apply to a given situation. It is only God who in his wisdom at such

times can teach us how the overruling 'law of love' applies. Rules and regulations are to be servants, not masters!

Have you ever come across rules like 'Christians shouldn't watch TV, Christians shouldn't go to the theatre, Christians shouldn't dance &c'? It's yeast! What is the result of these rules? When Christians submit to them, they stop thinking prayerfully about their daily doings or not-doings. Instead of listening to God and making decisions in freedom, they are ruled by the convictions of others and lose that freedom in which growth is possible. Where legalism rules, growth is not possible. And besides, legalism so often produces hypocritical behaviour.²¹¹

Once they are freed from legalism, people can arise with a new lifestyle, a new way of expressing themselves. But freedom is a life full of choice, and even wrong choices are possible. The risk of such adventure brings us so close to God! In Jesus' parable, when the master gives out his talents he tells his three servants to work with them, but not how to work with them. To bury a talent was a sin! So it is with our talents. We mustn't hide them, we must develop them, to become great artists, great diplomats, great secretaries, great home-makers, great businesspeople, great scientists: to be light in the world. And give the fruit time to grow! If that fruit, or the person who bears it, glorifies God, it is not 'leaven' but a jewel of the Kingdom.²¹² Leaven narrows life to a small and mean-minded ghetto, governed by regulations and by fear of the evil world outside. But we ought to be 'a holy nation, a royal priesthood'.

Where is this grandeur? In the life of the church and the life of God's children? Let's throw the leaven of legalism out so that we'll be able to create new things and renew the old. The law of freedom is given to enable us to live full lives. Full of the riches of Christ. It may lead us into unusual paths. Who knows? But one thing is sure: the law of freedom leads to God!

*For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*²¹³

Temple art

We know from the Bible that the Temple in Jerusalem was a very impressive building. We have already touched on the tremendous creativity involved in building it. When people came to the Temple to worship, they were surrounded by a beautiful display of art. The whole environment worked together to focus their attention on God. The Temple was a house of prayer for all nations.

Being a place where the public gathered, it obviously attracted the attention of the greedy as well. Mammon reared his head. Presenting his trade as something worthy, he offered to serve the worshippers: they could buy their sacrifice right on the premises. The religious were just as eager to take advantage of this situation: they instituted a rule that only special coins could be given as an offering. So, stalls were erected where people could exchange ordinary currency for the special coins. It was a well-oiled business, and money was made. In a subtle way, the worshippers were distracted by the noise of commercial activity. Their acceptance was conditional on special coins. Jesus had an answer to this: he overturned the stalls and drove the money-changers away.²¹⁴ He restored the courtyard of the Temple to its original use. Children could even play there again. Once again worshippers could focus their attention fully on God. Once again they could take in the beauty of the Temple. The Temple belonged to God, not to Mammon.

What about our 'temples' today? After the iconoclasm of the Reformation, so many Protestant churches became boring. We have the art of the word, but not the art of the unexpected, the art of playing, the art of celebration.

Very few of our present-day 'temples' display any artistic beauty that would draw our attention to God. Hardly any works of art are

to be found there. Sometimes they have become marketplaces as well: often there are bookstalls and jumble sales on church premises. But how would people react if an artist proposed to put on an exhibition instead of a service? Or if the children wanted to play? Or a drama group wanted to perform? (Of course, the theme would be a biblical one...) Are we not as hypocritical as the religious leaders in the Temple?

We think nothing of all the commercial activities on our church premises. But oh dear! if something a little unusual is asked for to enhance our worship of God! Is there any 'temple art' in your church that helps you to focus your attention on God?

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David', they became angry.²¹⁵

Learning to be wasters

In our modern age we are taught to be efficient. Time is money. Production procedures are aimed at keeping waste to a minimum. Everything has to be useful. This utilitarian view has also infiltrated our spiritual lives. The Protestant work ethic is a perfect example.

There are plenty of examples in the scriptures that show us that God takes a very different attitude. In the book of Deuteronomy we find instructions about tithing. The Israelites were to keep one-tenth of their produce for feasting in the presence of the Lord. If they were living too far away from the sanctuary, they could sell their tithes and use the money to buy whatever they fancied when they were able to celebrate (especially food and drink &c).²¹⁶ We can also read the instructions for harvesting.²¹⁷ No one was allowed to harvest the whole crop: everyone had to leave something for the poor to gather. A waste from the farmers' point of view.

Jesus' disciples had difficulty in understanding this principle. We find two stories in the New Testament where women poured expensive perfume over Jesus. They were happy to waste. A lot of love was expressed in their actions, and Jesus deeply appreciated it.²¹⁸ The disciples and Simon the Pharisee didn't agree. They didn't see the point. The disciples had quick minds and thought it better to spend all that money on the poor. The Pharisee was offended by the fact that the woman who anointed Jesus' feet had a dubious reputation. But Jesus saw the love and reverence in the hearts of these two women. They had perceived who he was. Their worship was very moving.

There is a lot we can learn from these two women. We can also learn something from the attitude of both the disciples and the Pharisee. Why do we always look for the usefulness of something? 'Wasting' something on someone you love is never waste. It

deepens the relationship. It's a way to show deep appreciation and reverence. A church that has learned the art of 'wasting' in this manner will also find ways to meet the needs of the poor—both those who suffer material poverty and those who are spiritually poor, who lack vision.

To want to 'waste' something to bless somebody else is an attitude of the Kingdom. It may seem foolish, but God loves such fools. In giving up our lives and our rights, we can only gain. And how important it is to be able to relax and to enjoy what others do! Maybe it seems insignificant, but the smallest sign of creativity already has significance in itself. It is not a waste to be creative.

*Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'*²¹⁹

The only way

At the Last Supper Jesus said some very profound things to his disciples. 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' This piece of scripture has a tremendous practical implication: there is no other way to see our lives develop truthfully than through Jesus. Only through knowing Jesus can we come to perfect creativity. It would be good if every artist read the book *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, who illustrates this truth beautifully.

The next verse continues: 'If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.' Knowing Jesus means also knowing his Father, our Creator and source of all that is created. Jesus came to take away our sin, so that all that was marred might be restored. Getting to know God means new opportunity to create things in his image. Living in the Truth means that we can make real choices again, being freed from all that would bind us.

Freedom can lead to abuse. So Paul exhorts us, "Everything is permissible for me," but not everything is beneficial.²²⁰ In all we do, we are to consider other people. Love demands that. If we know that our actions limit or restrict another person, we can choose not to carry them out. That is freedom. We are free to choose how we affect lives around us. Everything is permissible, but not always beneficial.

Such choices are our responsibility. We can never delegate this responsibility to others. Some leaders can be rather dominant and force their choices and opinions upon us, but we are responsible for whether or not we allow them to do so. God will hold us accountable for the things we choose to do or not do. We can never point to our leaders or others to excuse ourselves.²²¹

Nevertheless, God has given us who are born again a tremendous freedom to develop our gifts for the benefit of all. It takes discerning people to encourage those with creative gifts, to allow God's beauty to be revealed through his children. Where God's freedom reigns, great expressions of creativity are inevitable! But we should never forget that Jesus is the only way we can exercise that freedom, the only way to grow in the dynamics of the Kingdom and the only way to unfold ourselves, our gifts and our expressions of our creativity. Jesus is the only way to a renaissance, amongst people who are freed by the dynamics of God, freed for a never-ending process of change.

*Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'*²²²

The art of preaching

In this book I am laying the emphasis on the role art can play in the eyes of God. It may be that this leads to the misunderstanding that I have little regard for preaching. Nothing is further from the truth. I do believe, however, that the concept of proclamation has been narrowed down too much to preaching alone. Communicating a message is not restricted to the spoken word only: it can be done in many ways. What really matters is whether a message is getting across or not.

This raises the question of whether preachers always meet the standards required for a good sermon. In other words, do they communicate? It is no secret that some of us have to fight to stay awake during sermons out of sheer boredom. As teachers well know, getting and holding the attention of an audience requires skill. It is an art. In this sense, preachers need to be artists. They need to be gifted. They need to be 'in' their message. When this doesn't happen, no communication takes place. It's a waste of time.

What makes a good sermon? Perhaps we should have a look at how Jesus preached. The Sermon on the Mount is a beautiful example of good communication. Every sermon should have the same elements as this one in order to communicate.²²³ First of all, Jesus doesn't start by trying to impress people with great statements, but rather he shows his compassion for them. He doesn't exalt himself above them, but speaks as one of them. He is familiar with the struggles of life and therefore he understands their needs well. So he starts, 'Blessed are...' Words of hope and encouragement, that build up their faith. Jesus regards people as human beings, not as objects. He restores their dignity by pointing out their importance in the Kingdom of God: You are salt, you

are light... Only then do exhortations follow, without any brow-beating.

The way Jesus taught showed deep humility and love, and his form of preaching is fascinating. This is how his words were seasoned with salt, and so were effective. This is the only way the words of a preacher will be able to communicate the word of God effectively. Preaching is an art. It requires a gift. A gift to be exercised. We can still learn a lot from the way Jesus communicated.

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.²²⁴

The gift of leadership

Having served as a co-pastor for a while and having been a leader in Christian work, I can assure you that it takes skill to be a good leader. I can only say this with the greatest humility, knowing only too well all the mistakes I have made and will make in days to come. Looking at my own experiences, and studying what the Bible says about leadership, it's obvious to me that leaders face many pitfalls.

One of the worst mistakes one can make as a leader is trying to manipulate people into doing the things you most want them to do. This can be done in many ways, such as by suggesting that the Lord has told you that things have to be done in such and such a way, or by telling just part of the truth and denying a full discussion of all the matters concerned. Manipulating people basically means reducing them to slaves. They are denied their dignity. They get no opportunity to express their creativity. Manipulation also implies pride and arrogance in the leader, since they consider themselves to be superior to their 'flock'. How presumptuous! How tiresome!

Yet leadership is a gift. Authority is a gift. Authoritarianism is not. What is the difference between the two? Perhaps it can be illustrated best by the effect of each. The nature of authority is to serve. It respects others. It brings the best out of other people. It leads people to a common goal. Authoritarianism is by nature demanding. It is exercised at the expense of other people for selfish gain. Authoritarianism is grasping and selfish through and through. God-given authority is described in terms of shepherding: leading, feeding and protecting the flock. The welfare of the flock is paramount.²²⁵ Leadership is a creative and productive activity.

It is easy to see whether leaders are exercising the right kind of authority. Their fruit is seen in their flock. A church that shows

a high level of uniformity indicates authoritarianism. We should never reproduce clones of ourselves. On the other hand, a church that shows a great diversity in gifts indicates a mature leadership. Such leaders are not afraid of letting their members grow into full participants in church life. They want to see everybody develop all of their personal gifts. This kind of leadership is not insecure. It trusts God to guide the congregation into maturity, and realizes that the wisdom required to lead them is also a gift from God.

Leadership is demanding and requires sacrifice. Selfishness is out of the question. A good shepherd lays down their life for the sheep. This whole process starts with asking yourself why you are a leader and, if needs be, seeking God's help in purifying your motives.

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD.²²⁶

Being stewards

The great thing about being Christians is the fact that we are stewards. Nothing belongs to us; everything is given to us in order to be used for others. In 1 Peter 4:10 we read: 'Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.' So, there is no need to be preoccupied with building our own kingdom or sweating at self-realization. No, serving others is the key to bringing pleasure to both God and humankind.

What about 'God's grace in its various forms'? Isn't it wonderful that God has not given us all the same kind of gift? How boring that would be! Nothing is more boring than uniformity. No, God gives us different gifts, which allows us to illustrate the uniqueness of all God makes. We are unique; so are our gifts. This makes us interdependent if we wish to project God's character to the world. How important it is, therefore, that we do interrelate and serve one another! Didn't Jesus tell us that by being one we proclaim the gospel?²²⁷ Oneness in diversity!

Gifts bring responsibility. We need to take stock of our gifts in order to develop them. A good steward will use his talents to the full. The parable of the talents illustrates this.²²⁸ Anyone who buries his talent dishonours God and will be condemned.

Gifts need practice. It takes constant use to achieve a good standard. We should assess our work against the following criteria: durability, harmony, integrity, sincerity, purity, excellence and beauty. These are always the mark of a good use of gifts. A deep desire for excellence will look for all those qualities. It is the mission of every steward and it is the spirit of the Kingdom. We may all differ in ability, but we are all responsible for showing diligence.

As Peter said, our gifts are given to serve others in various forms. As artists, we can serve society and the church in the way we produce our work. This is not optional. God expects us to use what we are given. But it is a privilege, for he has given us everything. When we work out of thankfulness for his gift, we are restored to full humanity. It takes away personal ambition and heals our sense of personal failure. What a great challenge to use our creativity as service in such a transforming way.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves . . . Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus . . .

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.²²⁹

Being spiritual is being practical

Throughout history people have tended to make a distinction between the spiritual and the natural. The result is that some people encourage us to believe that being spiritual means abstaining from 'worldly activity'. By this they mean everything they have not received guidance about from the Holy Spirit. Rolling up your sleeves is seen as being non-spiritual, as 'a work of the flesh'. Time is spent meeting together as Christians and pondering over the scriptures rather than being involved in the world. But the Bible doesn't divide the world into such compartments, the sacred and the secular. For God the world is one: his world.

Although we are urged not to participate in evil activity, we are encouraged to be 'in the world'. Why else would Jesus tell us to be the salt or the light of the world? Why else would he tell us to work hard with the talents we are given? The master in his parable didn't instruct the servants he gave talents to to use them for 'spiritual' business only! The fact that Jesus used money as an illustration shows he had down-to-earth matters in mind. The master didn't even tell his servants how to work with the talents. He simply told them to work with them. Perhaps we should take a closer look at this parable in Matthew 25:14-30.

First of all, we should notice that everyone was given something. How comforting to see that no one was left out! Then, the task in hand was clearly spelt out: the master was going away and was entrusting his capital to his servants. It is clear that stewardship was intended, not possession. The master knew his servants well, for he distributed his capital according to the ability of each individual. No one was put under stress and no one received anything beyond their ability. All they had to do was work hard with what they were given. A very practical task indeed. We all

know the outcome. All the man who had been given one talent did was to bury it and sit on it. Nobody benefited.

Things are no different today. Being Christians means that we have received extra privileges, because the Lord has given us not only the talents we were born with but also gifts of the Kingdom at our new birth. Working together with God in this world means that our contribution to it can be extraordinarily great. People without God can only draw strength from their own resources, but those in God have his eternal provision to fill them with divine inspiration. How dare we dig a hole and sit on our gifts! No, being spiritual means working very hard. Not just for the church but also in the world. People without God may even draw their inspiration from the Evil One. Should we give him a free hand? Are we not to resist him? May God give us boldness to take our place in the world!

Come on, roll up your sleeves and get going! Time is short.

*'His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."'*²³⁰

Different values

Being involved in the world around us soon makes us aware of the fact that the world operates on different values from our own. Why and how we do things very much depends on our worldview. Our goals are totally different. The Bible teaches us that the objectives of the world are directly opposed to the direction the Lord wants us to go in. The world wants to serve itself. Christians want to serve God.

It isn't easy for a Christian to work alongside people with a worldly outlook. It is very tempting simply to please yourself. But the Lord wants us to live by the principles of love, respect and compassion: considering the other. Pride and selfishness are anathema in God's kingdom. Living in loving consideration for other people will always be noted by those working around you. In the world it's unusual.

Living out different values is a great way to witness. Yes, it will clash with the way the world around us operates, but that forces people to think through their actions. Clashing values are part of living out the Kingdom—not that we should look for conflict!

If the church fails to understand the difference between the values of the Kingdom of God and those of Satan, it will fail in its proclamation of the ethics and values of dignity, humanity, integrity and holiness. Then it will fall to the temptations of the Evil One and will soon take on board the wrong values. It always saddens me when I see that happen in the Christian world.

The world values the storing-up of temporal treasures. Jesus exhorts us to 'store up for [ourselves] treasures in heaven ... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'²³¹ These different values are a battleground for our hearts, which will determine our desires.

One temptation Christian artists face regularly in their work is that of selfish competition. It is so easy to belittle the work of others in order to exalt our own. This is a worldly way of doing things. It's so important to respect others, their values, their work, their gifts and their ministries. It's so important to respect every human being. Another temptation is to be motivated by commercial interest rather than artistic beauty. And another temptation is the desire for status.

Holding firm to our different values is the only way to avoid any compromise. Compromise clouds our testimony. Integrity is a testimony in itself. Redeemed from superficiality and mediocrity and given a new mentality, life becomes suddenly so precious, so real, so full of value. A real adventure claiming new lands.

*'And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing.'*²³²

The truth

One particular value over which we are bound to clash with the world is the concept of truth. Many people, like Pilate, wonder what truth is, without being willing to accept the ultimate Truth: Jesus Christ! A world that no longer accepts absolutes will not acknowledge the absolute Truth. Jesus tells us that truth sets us free.²³³ This implies that those who don't know the truth are automatically not free to be themselves, to fulfil their purpose in God. They are trapped by the host of partial truths that surrounds them.

When Jesus told us, 'I am the way and the truth and the life,'²³⁴ he was saying essentially that all truth has to be measured against him. He is the standard of ethics, life, values, morality &c. This breaks the limitations and bondages imposed by human traditions, by class, education, upbringing and religion, by false aesthetic values and false ethics. The truth Jesus brings is a vibrant, creative life, not a life strangled by rules and regulations which suffocate all creative activity!

How does this work in practice? How do we know when we proclaim this new ethos of humility and creative power in our lives? By looking at the message our work communicates. It may communicate beauty, but beauty is not necessarily truthful. Everyone can agree that Aaron created a beautiful golden calf, but it was detestable to God. Its message couldn't stand the test of truth. This principle is still valid today. Great skills alone don't say anything. We have to ask ourselves what we are communicating through our work. What is our motivation? What you do and who you are should be one.

The truth will set you free. I, as a mortal being, am not saying that. No, the One who is the Truth tells us this important fact. How

important it is that we, as Christians and as artists, understand this! It is not just important how something is made, but what it communicates. In fact, we should evaluate everything this way. Continual alertness is vital to understand the truth, and once found, God's truth is irresistible to the Christian. May God give us wisdom, knowledge and understanding!

Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

*After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him.'*²³⁵

The desert experience

Who has never gone through a time when everything seemed totally barren? When strength failed? It's a deeply painful experience, which can happen to anyone at any time. Some may suffer for a short while, but for others the experience may be like a chronic illness. The question often asked is, 'Why does God allow this to happen?' The Bible is quite clear about this: it tests our hearts. Those who fail the test will fall back into their old ways, depending on human strength. Those who pass the test will never again wish to depend on human strength, but only on God's.

Think about David. His prospects were glorious. He had been anointed to be king. What else would one want in life? If that isn't success, what is? One would expect David's path to be paved with gold from that day onwards. But no, this king-to-be had to flee for his life! Yet this experience was the best school to prepare him for his kingship. He learned not to take authority into his own hands but to rely constantly on God. He also learned how to develop strategy. David was careful in listening to God and obeyed the guidance he was given. It made him a king after God's heart.

We see similar developments in the life of Moses. He was aware of a special calling from God for his people. However, he had to learn how to wait on God, so he was sent into a desert. Sent into oblivion. A life wasted, it seemed. But we know what happened. All the skills he learned during his desert experience were essential for his task: leading a people through a desert!

Jesus faced a desert experience too. Before he started his ministry, he was led into the desert to be tested. The whole experience revealed the heart of Jesus. It revealed his unconditional trust in God, his Father. Like David, Jesus had the opportunity to seize power before he was meant to take it. The

Devil offered him authority over the whole world—but at a price. No, Jesus was willing to wait for the time when the Father wanted to give him all authority. The desert experience strengthened him. He went into the desert directed by the Spirit. Luke 4:1 tells us that he was full of the Spirit when he went into the desert, and in verse 14 of the same chapter we read that he returned in the power of the Spirit. This really sums up why the Lord allows us to be tried in desert experiences: they make us strong!

In the desert we learn to find the hidden wells of God's grace. All our pride dries up and all that is left is our dependence on God. The pain of suffering becomes the root of glory.²³⁶ The life of every true leader has the mark of a desert experience. So it is in the artistic world.²³⁷ Out of pain we arrive at great works of art, finding the hidden wells of new creativity in God: understanding revelation and vision.

Everything withers in the desert except the truth of God. We learn to be firm on the only solid foundation there is. And suddenly there comes a new shower of inspiration. How soon does barren land change into a flower garden!²³⁸ How true was this lesson of transformation in my own life!

*Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written,
"Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him."*

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.²³⁹

Not by might nor by power

God says, 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit.'²⁴⁰ How true is this for Christians and especially for creative people! Once we become 'new creations' we begin to do things in a new way, to be creative ourselves. This is all stirred up by the Spirit, in creative thought. God wants to open that door in our minds, so that we will be able to do his works. Creativity and creation belong to God. He wants to reveal them in us. God the Master Creator has a toolbox, just as every artist does. In it are nine gifts of the Spirit, to equip us for daily living, daily communication and daily creativity.²⁴¹ Sometimes God's children have not been wise and used the right tools in a particular task or situation, and damage and hurt have been an obvious result. Just as every artist has to get better at using their tools, how important it is for us to use the tools of the Toolbox and thereby to learn! The more we grow, the more skilful our art will be. So: more excellence, less superficiality! 'How great are your works, O God!' God wants us to express who he is in the never-ending studio called 'life'. May we all become great works of Royal Art!²⁴²

Our whole lives and all the ways we express ourselves become an act of worship. Worship is so much more than our weekly praise in the Sunday liturgy. Our breakfast should be an act of praise. In the way we drive our cars we can worship God. How we love our partners or our children should be an act of worship. We are the worship, we are the praise. So, it is up to us to choose which of the only two principles of this world we will serve: that which is edifying and creative and does good—or the opposite.

Creative thinking can find expression in a work of art, in a philosophical thought or in an insight about ethics or science. Today we desperately need new creative thinkers who, using the

Toolbox of God, will rewrite the ethics of science, the values we live by and the goals and patterns of our society: thinkers who will recreate our culture.²⁴³ Paul was such a creative thinker. He used the Toolbox to create values and ethics. Just read the story of how he stood boldly in the centre of the civilization, culture and science of his day, the Areopagus in Athens! He was so creative that he was able to explain the Kingdom of God without using Christian slogans. He even quoted famous pagan poets.²⁴⁴ How many of us are able to stand up in the centres of civilization and explain the Kingdom of God in a creative way? Creative thinking is not something static, it is a process, and that process has influence.

We need creative people today, using the Toolbox, recreating society, so that the art of living will flourish.

*'Then the spirit of the LORD will possess you, and you will be in a prophetic frenzy along with them and be turned into a different person. Now when these signs meet you, do whatever you see fit to do, for God is with you.'*²⁴⁵

Areopagus

One day Paul was in Athens, the centre of civilization, science and the arts (you'll find the story in Acts 17:16–34). It's helpful to study in depth his attitude and his speech.

It's remarkable that he doesn't condemn the many statues, temples and works of religious art he sees. He uses them to make his point: 'I see that you are religious...' His attitude is positive. (How much we can learn already from this! Too often we are so quick to condemn people or situations or societies, or even other churches.)

Secondly, he uses pagan art—an altar (verse 23) and (in verse 28) quotations from two famous poets, Epimenides and Aratus, who were like pop stars of their day. So, here again there is a lot to learn. Paul knew that spouting Bible quotations in somebody's face would never convince anyone.

This episode challenges us about the way we use the arts, the way we get across to non-Christians and the way we behave in a 'secular' world. For Paul, 'the world' was never a location but a way of thinking. As he was free in his mind, heart and spirit, he could go anywhere and eat, drink and celebrate wherever he was. Like Paul, we don't need to be afraid of the centres of civilization and power, art and science. Why? Because we have the ultimate Truth and the presence with us of the Almighty, the Holy One. And that will communicate. Finally—and this may be a great relief—we can never convince; only the Holy Spirit can.

So, the challenge for us is to create the best art for the Highest. And the example of this episode will help us to relax and enjoy art that represents other worldviews or other civilizations.

'For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription,

LEEN LA RIVIÈRE

"To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."²⁴⁶

'For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said,

"For we too are his offspring."²⁴⁷

Final destination

Humankind has tried to leave its mark on the planet in the form of buildings and works of art. Our celebrities want posterity to remember them. It's in our nature to desire immortality—but our striving for immortality doesn't get us anywhere. We return to dust. Babylon didn't last, Ancient Egypt didn't last, the Persian Empire didn't last. Nor did Alexander the Great, the Roman Empire, Ghengis Khan, the Third Reich...

Consider the words of prophets such as Amos, Habakkuk, Jeremiah and Hosea.²⁴⁸ They all say that every work of art, every expression of humankind, will be futile and will return to dust if it is based on pride—which is, in fact, a striving to build one's own eternity apart from God. We only create false gods and idols. Even if these products are beautiful, they don't carry the mark of the truth of God. How easily the people of Israel were led astray in times of abundance! Let this be a warning for Christians!

In the days to come, two mighty and beautiful cities will be revealed: Babylon and the New Jerusalem. They stand for two visions, two sets of ideals, two sorts of goals, two ways of thinking, two ways of living. Babylon is the self-fulfilling prophecy that if people want to go 'their own way' they will build magnificent societies and make great works of art. God hates the pride this betrays, when people think they are so mature that they don't need a God any more. And just read in Revelation how life will be then: peace and prosperity and trade like never before, but no truth and therefore no values, no ethics, no morality!²⁴⁹

Loss of all dignity means the end of humanity. Unless we first have a clear view of God we can have no right view of humankind, and all relations go awry. It will be a horrible time for those who long for justice, the real justice of God. When God sends judgement

on Babylon, woe to all those who violate the truth! Judgement on Lucifer and his works. No work of art that is not based on the eternal truth will survive. It will be the end of all human strivings.

How different is the New Jerusalem! Now that time has passed away and eternity breaks through, the most magnificent work of art will be revealed. In a new heaven and a new earth, only a new city with new people can flourish. If you read what God uses to create this city, it takes your breath away. The descriptions in Revelation suggest that the prophet was struggling to find the right words to tell us what he saw.²⁵⁰ And then to think that this is all prepared for God's royal children, for you and me! How I long to see the fulfilment of the promise, 'I am making everything new!'²⁵¹ May this revelation of the future be a challenge to us to become a fountain of fresh water for today!

He called out with a mighty voice,

'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

It has become a dwelling-place of demons,

a haunt of every foul spirit,

a haunt of every foul bird,

a haunt of every foul and hateful beast.'²⁵²

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.²⁵³

Does it make sense?

During my travels I have met lots of artists who wrestle with the thought that maybe one day, when Christ returns, everything will be burned up in accordance with 1 Corinthians 3:12–15. So, they wonder, why go on creating? Well, there's a lot of false teaching about this issue and also about purgatory. This and other similar scriptures are metaphors! But if all our creations are not burned up, what is going to happen? We find the answer in Revelation 21:24 & 26.

One day God will establish his kingdom on earth and his capital city, the New Jerusalem, will descend from heaven.²⁵⁴ This New Jerusalem is already a huge and incredible masterpiece of art—but it is empty. Of course God's people will live there, but still that city needs more. So, what will happen? First, we read in verse 24 that all 'the kings of the earth' will bring into that city everything they consider to be of value ('their splendour')! So all the contents of their palaces, their museums, their safes &c will find their rightful place in this city.

Then we read in verse 26 that all the nations (peoples, tribes &c) will bring into it all that they see as having value. So all folk art, all high art, the content of every personal collection, museum and library, every invention and every work of art will arrive at its final destination. All the great products of the whole human quest for millennia will finally come to the place where they should be. And they will adorn the City of God.

This is a great relief for any artist. Yes, your music, your dance, your poem, your book, your statue, your painting, your video clip or whatever will one day reach its final destination: the City of God. And God will welcome it and love it. And have you ever doubted

that people understand and appreciate your art? They will then! Yes, it all makes sense.

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it.²⁵⁵

Royal creativity

When Mary was told by the angel that she was going to be the mother of the coming Messiah, she asked, 'How will this be?'²⁵⁶ When we ponder the things God has promised us, we often ask the same question. And, as to Mary, the answer is the same: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.'²⁵⁷ There is no difference in principle here. It was impossible for Mary to conceive, being a virgin and having no sexual relationship. But God makes the impossible possible. He speaks into being things that are not.

After reading this book you may feel that I'm rather idealistic. Perhaps you think I have no eye for our fallen nature. Let me say that I am not idealistic. Yes, I know we are fallen. But if we are to take the word of God seriously for today, then we have to believe that when we are born again we are new creations. New creations filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered by the Spirit, when we are obedient to his will. My realism tells me that in God all things are possible. My realism also tells me that God is the most glorious employer who has provided me with every tool I need to fulfil who I am in his light. That is the realistic truth we are to live in today.

God's work in me is his message. From cover to cover the Bible tells me that when God works, creativity is automatically in evidence. I started this book with a plea to encourage the creative among us. Really this means that we have to encourage every member of the Body.

In history we see some imbalance in our appreciation of gifted people. Preachers and teachers are often the ones who receive the most credit—and credit is due to them, for their responsibility weighs heavily on them. May this appreciation be widened to embrace those with artistic skill, so that the spoken word will

be complemented by visual beauty! In other words: May royal creativity flourish!

And royal creativity will flourish, for God is stretching out his hands to us with grace, longing to restore and renew everything to its original state. Not to dictate but to rule in service. No self-realization, no expression of pride, but surrender to the Creator, who knows us best. We don't have God on a string, so we will live and work in dependence on him. Let God restore our self-image and self-esteem! If it is only us building ourselves up, we will be building a new Babylon.

Let us learn why Lucifer fell, because of pride. Let us work not in a spirit of rebellion, not with an attitude of 'Art for art's sake', not turning means into ends, but worshipping God with creations of truth. We can only be truly and brilliantly creative when our gifts are submitted to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As Mary gave herself entirely to God, to do with according to his will, so our attitude should be the same. So it was with the great biblical artists: the men who built the tabernacle and the Temple, and others like David and Solomon.

So our typewriters, computers, dances, scripts, films, pencils, brushes, palettes, synthesizers and guitars become tools of the Kingdom, helping us to be salt and light.

*Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'*²⁵⁸

*'Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.'*²⁵⁹

Afterword: what next?

The Continentals

A great way is to join the *Continentals*. Of course you have to meet the criteria—but once accepted you will be given excellent training that will be invaluable to you both as an individual and as a member of your church. Your church too will benefit greatly. Participating in a project like this will teach you practical creativity and crosscultural communication. It will build your character, enhance your motivation and participation and develop not only your artistic excellence but also your discipleship, servanthood and personal life with God.

Continentals projects last from two to four weeks. You can participate in the following age-groups:

8–12: Continental Kids

13–16: Young Continentals

17–34: the Continentals

35–55: the Continental Encores

There are Continentals groups in Europe that speak English, French, Dutch, German, Slovak, Romanian, Italian, Hungarian... And there are Continentals in the United States, Canada, Japan, Korea, South America &c.

For further information, write to:

The Continentals, Postbox 81065, 3009 GB Rotterdam, The Netherlands

or email: info@continentalministries.org

or visit: www.continentalministries.org

How can you develop your creativity as a professional?

Every year since 1981 the *Christian Artists Seminar* has been held in the Netherlands during August. Conducted in English, this brings

together hundreds of leading talents in all the arts. The seminar provides hundreds of workshops and masterclasses, specially designed to develop skill and give experience. Some 80 of the best Christian professionals and teachers offer first-class professional training. Thousands of students have come here to study, sometimes learning as much about life and art and work as they have learned in many years at an academy or conservatory. And there is a new post-academic modular programme for continuing education.

For further information, write to:

Christian Artists Europe, Postbox 81065, 3009 GB Rotterdam, The Netherlands

or email: info@christianartists.org

or visit: www.christianartists.org

Christian artists organizations in Europe can be found on:
www.christianartists-network.org

In Britain, the annual *Greenbelt Arts Festival* takes place towards the end of August. This is a Christian festival with a radical edge, first held in 1974, whose four-day programme today includes scores of seminars on cultural, social, political and spiritual issues, as well as performances of music, theatre and other art forms.

For further information, write to:

Greenbelt Festivals, All Hallows on the Wall, 83 London Wall, London EC2M 5ND, UK

or telephone: (+44) 20 7374 2760

or email: info@greenbelt.org.uk

or visit: www.greenbelt.org.uk

Also in Britain, the *Arts Centre Group* is a national association of Christians professionally involved in the world of the arts, the media and entertainment, in everything from fashion to film editing, poetry to painting, stained-glass window design to script writing. It aims to help its members to integrate their faith with

their artistic activities and so to become a transforming influence in the arts and the media.

For further information, write to:

ACG @ Intermission, St Saviour's, Walton Place London SW3 1SA, UK

or telephone: (+44) 20 7581 2777

or email: info@artscentregroup.org.uk

or visit: www.artscentregroup.org.uk

During 2004, Piquant Editions in the UK launched an arts club called *Outside the Box*. Its single vision is to continue putting the works of a small number of Christians in the arts into print every year in order to make their work known to the world-wide Body of Christ. Join the club and receive two fully illustrated art/gift books a year plus a quarterly e-newsletter.

For a membership form and/or our latest catalogues, write to:

Piquant Editions, PO Box 83, Carlisle, CA3 9GR, UK

or telephone: +44 1228 525075

or email: info@piquant.net

or visit: www.piquanteditions.com

In the United States, *Christians in the Visual Arts* was founded in 1977 to consider the place of the Christian artist in the church and in the world at large. Today its role is to explore the relationship between the visual arts and the Christian faith, to nurture Christian artists and, ultimately, to establish a Christian presence in the secular art world. CIVA publishes a yearly journal, *SEEN*, and a bi-yearly directory of artists and arts-related organizations.

For further information, write to:

Christians in the Visual Arts, 255 Grapevine Road, Wenham, MA 01984-1813, USA

or telephone: (+1) 978 867 4124

or email: office@civa.org

or visit: www.civa.org

Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion

This is a prestigious Christian quarterly literary and arts journal published in the US with an excellent supporting website.

For further information write to:

Image, 3307 Third Avenue, West Seattle, WA 98119, USA

or telephone: +1 206 281 2988

or email: image@imagejournal.org

or visit: www.imagejournal.org

In Canada, the charitable foundation *Imago* has advocated biblical reflection and practical action on a wide range of topics that relate to culture for over 30 years. Since 1997 the foundation has focused its attention on the development of the arts and artists in Canada by fostering and sustaining new arts initiatives. The foundation's quarterly newsletter can be obtained from their website.

For more information, write to:

133 Southvale Drive, Toronto, Ontario, M4G 1G6, Canada

or telephone: (+1) 41 6421 8745

or email: franklin@ultratech.net

or visit: www.imago-arts.on.ca

In **THE NETHERLANDS** several christian artists and culture organizations are active. About all is published in the quarterly magazine SJOFAR, published by Continental Sound/Christian Artists Postbox 81065 3009 GB Rotterdam – The Netherlands 0031 10 4212592

info@continentalsound.org info@christianartists.org
www.continentalsound.org www.christianartists.org

Christian Artists organizations around **EUROPE**: you can find them via website: www.christianartists-network.org

Notes

¹ Ephesians 4:13 & 15

² Genesis 1:1–31. The word 'good' here also means 'full of greatness or beauty'.

³ Genesis 1:26

⁴ Compare with Genesis 1:28; also 2 Timothy 2:12 and Revelation 5:10, where the idea of ruling is related more to the future.

⁵ Genesis 3:19

⁶ Genesis 2:19–20. Note that naming, sorting, analysing and investigating animals and plants are highly creative and intelligent activities.

⁷ Genesis 1:27–28. See also Genesis 2:15 & 19–20.

⁸ Revelation 5:10. Also look at Revelation 20:4 and 2 Timothy 2:12. In discussing creativity I consider every gift we have from our birth, plus our spiritual gifts—see Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:1–11.

⁹ Genesis 4:17–22

¹⁰ Genesis 6:5–13. After the Flood cultural pride became a problem. See Genesis 11:1–9, especially verse 4.

¹¹ Genesis 11:31–12:9

¹² Ephesians 6:12

¹³ Romans 12:2. See also James 1:27.

¹⁴ Genesis 27:27–29

¹⁵ Romans 12:14

¹⁶ Genesis 12:2–3. See also Genesis 24:60, 39:5 & 48:1–49:28. Other examples of creative, prophetic blessings are found in Leviticus 9:23; Numbers 6:22–27 and 23:7 & 18–25; Deuteronomy 11:1–29 and 33:1–29; 1 Kings 8:10–63 & 66; Ephesians 1:3 and 1 Peter 3:9.

¹⁷ Proverbs 11:11. In the New Testament we see that Jesus' life on earth was characterized by blessing—see Matthew 14:19 and 26:26; Mark 10:13–16 and Luke 1:42–55 and 2:34–35.

¹⁸ Romans 12:14.

¹⁹ Genesis 35:1–7

²⁰ Matthew 6:24

²¹ Genesis 28:18–19. 'Bethel' means 'house of God'—see Genesis 28:10–19 and 35:6–14. On another occasion, Joshua instructed the Israelites to collect stones of remembrance on their journey across the Jordan. We read about it in Joshua 4:1–9 & 20–23 and 24:1–28.

²² 1 Samuel 7:12 (the whole story is 7:1–12). 'Eben-ezer' means 'Thus far has the Lord helped us.' We read about the bronze snake Moses made in Numbers 21:9 and about how it became a temptation to the people of Israel, who used it as an object of worship, in 2 Kings 18:4.

²³ Exodus 3:14

²⁴ Romans 8:14–21; 1 John 3:24, 4:13, 16 & 19 and 5:12

²⁵ Colossians 3:10

²⁶ Exodus 7:1

²⁷ Revelation 1:8 & 18, 4:8 and 22:12–13

²⁸ 1 John 3:2

²⁹ Exodus 15:1–21

³⁰ Luke 15:11–32

³¹ Proverbs 15:15

³² Luke 15:23–24

³³ Revelation 1:6, 5:10 and 20:6

³⁴ 1 Peter 2:9

³⁵ Luke 12:22–34

- ³⁶ Luke 13:18–19
³⁷ Exodus 19:5–6
³⁸ 1 Peter 2:5
³⁹ Exodus 31:1–11
⁴⁰ Exodus 35:20–35
⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 3:16
⁴² Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)
⁴³ Exodus 40:34–35
⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 6:16
⁴⁵ Genesis 22
⁴⁶ Romans 12:1
⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 8:12, cf Philippians 4:18 and 1 Peter 2:5
⁴⁸ Genesis 4:5
⁴⁹ Leviticus 1–7
⁵⁰ Romans 8:8, Galatians 6:8
⁵¹ Hebrews 7:27, 9:14 and 10:12
⁵² Matthew 5:8; 2 Corinthians 11:2–3; 1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:22 and 1 John 3:3
⁵³ 1 Corinthians 10:31
⁵⁴ Leviticus 9:22–24
⁵⁵ Ephesians 5:1–2
⁵⁶ 1 Samuel 15:22; Mark 12:33 and Hebrews 10:8–9
⁵⁷ Luke 12:12; John 14:26 and 16:13
⁵⁸ James 1:5; Ephesians 1:17–18
⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 3:11–15; 2 Thessalonians 1:11–12 and 1 Peter 1:7
⁶⁰ Read the whole portion in Isaiah 1:13–18.
⁶¹ Numbers 16–17
⁶² Exodus 16:12–14
⁶³ Numbers 17:8
⁶⁴ John 8:54

- ⁶⁵ 1 Samuel 14:6–15
⁶⁶ Judges 6–7
⁶⁷ Acts 4:13
⁶⁸ Acts 17:6 (KJV)
⁶⁹ Matthew 5:14–16
⁷⁰ 1 Samuel 16:7. Some more passages that show who David was and how he acted are 1 Samuel 12, 16:13 and 26:9; 2 Samuel 5:1–25, 7:18–29, 8:15–18, 22 and 23; 1 Chronicles 6:31–32, 13:8, 15:16–16:6 & 41–42, 18:14 and 23–25:8 and Psalm 22.
⁷¹ 1 Samuel 17:34–36
⁷² Isaiah 40:11 and Jeremiah 31:10
⁷³ 1 Samuel 23:1–2 & 4 and 30:8; 2 Samuel 2:1 and 5:19 & 23
⁷⁴ 1 Samuel 24:3–15 and 26:5–21
⁷⁵ 2 Samuel 5:1–5
⁷⁶ 1 Chronicles 6:31–32, 15:16 and 23:5
⁷⁷ 2 Samuel 6:14–15; Amos 6:5b
⁷⁸ 1 Kings 5:5
⁷⁹ Psalm 51:10–12
⁸⁰ Psalm 12:7 and 16:1
⁸¹ Psalm 18, 34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 63 and 142
⁸² Read, for example, the following verses from the Psalms: 20:5, 30:12, 33:2–3, 40:4, 42:5, 43:4, 45:2, 47:6–8, 50:23, 57:8–10, 63:5, 66:8–17, 68:4–5 & 25–27, 81:3–5, 87:7, 89:16, 92:2–5, 95:1–2, 96:1–4, 98:1 & 4–8, 100:1–5, 105:1–3, 108:1–4, 111:1, 126:5, 145:10 and 150.
⁸³ Psalm 42:5
⁸⁴ John 14:12
⁸⁵ Matthew 15:32; John 6:57 and 1 Corinthians 12:13
⁸⁶ Romans 6:13
⁸⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:17

- ⁸⁸ John 6:63; Romans 8:11 and 1 Corinthians 3:16
⁸⁹ 1 John 3:18
⁹⁰ 1 John 5:3–5
⁹¹ Romans 6:4
⁹² Luke 18:27
⁹³ Hebrews 11:1
⁹⁴ Galatians 5:25
⁹⁵ Romans 12:2
⁹⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17
⁹⁷ 1 Kings 5:13
⁹⁸ 1 Kings 3:1–15 and 2 Chronicles 1:1–13
⁹⁹ 1 Kings 10:1–29, especially verse 24
¹⁰⁰ Matthew 6:25–34
¹⁰¹ 1 Kings 11:1–13
¹⁰² 2 Chronicles 10:13–14
¹⁰³ Matthew 6:28–33
¹⁰⁴ 2 Chronicles 2:5–6
¹⁰⁵ 1 Kings 6:7
¹⁰⁶ 1 Kings 7:14, cf 2 Chronicles 2:13
¹⁰⁷ 2 Chronicles 2:7–14
¹⁰⁸ 2 Chronicles 7:1–3
¹⁰⁹ Acts 4:31
¹¹⁰ 2 Chronicles 7:10
¹¹¹ 2 Chronicles 5:13–14
¹¹² 1 Kings 17:1–24, 18:20–46, 19:5–8, 20:1–22, 21:18–20 and 2 Kings 1:9–12
¹¹³ 2 Kings 2:19–22, 4:1–7, 8–37 & 42–44 and 6:1–7:20
¹¹⁴ 2 Kings 2:9
¹¹⁵ James 5:16. See also verses 17–18.
¹¹⁶ 2 Kings 2:9–14
¹¹⁷ 2 Kings 4:27

- ¹¹⁸ 2 Kings 4:31
¹¹⁹ 2 Kings 5:1–6
¹²⁰ 2 Kings 5:20–27
¹²¹ 2 Kings 5:20
¹²² Isaiah 48:20–21
¹²³ Revelation 18:2, 10 & 21
¹²⁴ 2 Timothy 1:7
¹²⁵ John 8:36
¹²⁶ 1 John 4:17–18
¹²⁷ 1 John 5:4–5 (NIV)
¹²⁸ Jeremiah 1:9–10
¹²⁹ Jeremiah 33:3
¹³⁰ Jeremiah 2:7–8
¹³¹ Jeremiah 2:5
¹³² Jeremiah 3:12–14
¹³³ Jeremiah 3:19
¹³⁴ Jeremiah 2:11–13
¹³⁵ Amos 3:8
¹³⁶ For example, see Habakkuk 2:2; Romans 1:17; Joel 2:28–32 and Acts 2:17–21.
¹³⁷ Matthew 25:21
¹³⁸ Nehemiah 10:39, 11:23 and 13:10–11
¹³⁹ Nahum 1:15
¹⁴⁰ 2 Chronicles 15
¹⁴¹ 2 Chronicles 17:1–10
¹⁴² For Joash, see 2 Chronicles 24:1–4; for Hezekiah, see 2 Chronicles 29 and 30; and for Josiah, see 2 Chronicles 34:1–35:5
¹⁴³ 2 Chronicles 19:2
¹⁴⁴ Joshua 6:1–9
¹⁴⁵ 2 Chronicles 20:21
¹⁴⁶ 2 Chronicles 13:12

- ¹⁴⁷ Psalm 149:6–9a (NIV)
¹⁴⁸ Ezra 6:3–5, 7:19, 21–24 and Nehemiah 2:19–20
¹⁴⁹ Nehemiah 4:1–3, 15–18
¹⁵⁰ Nehemiah 13:22
¹⁵¹ Nehemiah 12:44–47
¹⁵² Exodus 32:1–4 & 24
¹⁵³ Ephesians 6:13. Read this in the context of verses 10–18.
¹⁵⁴ For example, Luke 1:13 & 30 and 2:10 and Revelation 1:17
¹⁵⁵ Romans 8:15
¹⁵⁶ Luke 1:74 and Hebrews 2:15
¹⁵⁷ 2 Timothy 1:6–7 & 14 and 2:1
¹⁵⁸ Isaiah 43:1–7
¹⁵⁹ Isaiah 8:11–15
¹⁶⁰ Romans 8:35 & 37
¹⁶¹ Ezekiel 28:12–19
¹⁶² John 8:32
¹⁶³ 1 John 3:8 & 10
¹⁶⁴ 2 Timothy 2:25–26
¹⁶⁵ Daniel 12:2–3
¹⁶⁶ Jeremiah 13:1–11, 27:2, 18:1–6, 43:9, 51:63; Ezekiel 4:1–3, 5:1–4, 12:3–6, 3:26, 24:7 and 33:22; Hosea 1:2; Habakkuk 2:2 and Isaiah 8:1
¹⁶⁷ 2 Kings 3:15
¹⁶⁸ Joshua 6:1–5
¹⁶⁹ 1 Samuel 16:14–23
¹⁷⁰ Acts 21:10–12
¹⁷¹ Isaiah 30:32
¹⁷² Psalm 24:1, quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:26
¹⁷³ Proverbs 2:21
- ¹⁷⁴ Matthew 5:13–16
¹⁷⁵ John 17:15–17
¹⁷⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:16–20
¹⁷⁷ 1 Peter 2:4–10 (NIV)
¹⁷⁸ 1 John 1:5–7
¹⁷⁹ James 2:8
¹⁸⁰ Zechariah 9:16
¹⁸¹ 1 John 3:16–18
¹⁸² Malachi 2:7
¹⁸³ Matthew 2:1–11
¹⁸⁴ Genesis 22:13–14
¹⁸⁵ Matthew 10:41–42
¹⁸⁶ Ephesians 4:16 (NIV)
¹⁸⁷ Matthew 13:9
¹⁸⁸ Matthew 15:16–18
¹⁸⁹ Mark 6:31, Luke 5:27–32
¹⁹⁰ John 2:1–11
¹⁹¹ Ecclesiastes 3:12
¹⁹² Ecclesiastes 8:15
¹⁹³ Isaiah 58:5–11
¹⁹⁴ John 10:10
¹⁹⁵ Matthew 18:3
¹⁹⁶ Matthew 10:16
¹⁹⁷ Luke 11:28–30
¹⁹⁸ Matthew 6:25–34
¹⁹⁹ Deuteronomy 6:1–2
²⁰⁰ Isaiah 42:6–7; cf. Luke 4:18–21; Matthew 11:5 and 15:30–31 and Luke 7:22
²⁰¹ Matthew 9:36
²⁰² John 4:1–30
²⁰³ John 8:1–11
²⁰⁴ Luke 15:11–32

- ²⁰⁵ Matthew 23:16–17, 19, 24 & 26
²⁰⁶ Matthew 23:23
²⁰⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:1
²⁰⁸ Matthew 16:5–12 and 23:1–39
²⁰⁹ Luke 1:74
²¹⁰ Luke 11:42
²¹¹ Luke 12:1 and 18:9–14
²¹² Matthew 7:15–20
²¹³ Galatians 5:1
²¹⁴ John 2:16
²¹⁵ Matthew 21:14–15. Read this in the context of verses 12–13.
²¹⁶ Deuteronomy 14:22–29
²¹⁷ Leviticus 19:9–10 and 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:21–22
²¹⁸ Matthew 26:6–10 and Luke 7:36–50
²¹⁹ Mark 14:6–9
²²⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23
²²¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:21
²²² John 14:6–7
²²³ Matthew 5:1–22
²²⁴ Colossians 4:6
²²⁵ Isaiah 40:11. Bad shepherding is described in Jeremiah 10:21 and Isaiah 56:10–11.
²²⁶ Jeremiah 23:1–2
²²⁷ John 17:20–21
²²⁸ Matthew 25:14–30
²²⁹ Philippians 2:2–5, 14 & 15
²³⁰ Matthew 25:23. Read this in the context of the whole parable told in verses 14–30.
²³¹ Matthew 6:2–4 & 20–21
²³² Mark 4:18–19
- ²³³ John 8:32
²³⁴ John 14:6
²³⁵ John 18:37–38
²³⁶ 1 Peter 4:12–13
²³⁷ Of course, this is no excuse for people to misuse these situations—'Make the artist suffer more, so we get better art!' This is just a lie. An artist should always be fairly paid for their work.
²³⁸ Isaiah 53:3
²³⁹ Matthew 4:10–11. Read this in the context of the whole account in verses 1–11.
²⁴⁰ Zechariah 4:6
²⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 12:1–11
²⁴² 2 Corinthians 3:18
²⁴³ Romans 8:19–21
²⁴⁴ Acts 17:15–34
²⁴⁵ 1 Samuel 10:6–7
²⁴⁶ Acts 17:23
²⁴⁷ Acts 17:28
²⁴⁸ Amos 6:4–7; Habakkuk 2:18–19; Jeremiah 23:25–32 and Hosea 10:1–8
²⁴⁹ Revelation 18:1–24
²⁵⁰ Revelation 21:10–27
²⁵¹ Revelation 21:5
²⁵² Revelation 18:2
²⁵³ Revelation 21:2
²⁵⁴ Revelation 21:1–21
²⁵⁵ Revelation 21:24–26 (NIV)
²⁵⁶ Luke 1:34
²⁵⁷ Luke 1:35
²⁵⁸ Luke 1:38a
²⁵⁹ Luke 1:48b–49