

Created To Create

Phil Temple

[VIDEO: Nina Cried Power – Hozier

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2YgDua2gpk>]

ME: [Come out singing; to be stopped by singers]

OK, OK, I'm not a singer. I've been threatening to do this for a while, but I think it's safe to say I'm nowhere near as good as Pastor Tom was last week! My lack of singing ability is well-known – infamous perhaps. One time, Gemma leant over to me during worship and asked me to sing more quietly because I was, and I quote, "putting her off Jesus". In Ipswich, where there was less of a gap between congregation and worship leader, Sam had to ask me to sing more quietly as he couldn't hear the tune! It is fair to say that music is not my forte. Not only can I not sing, but I can't hear the tune, and I have no rhythm. I can't even clap in time!

Which perhaps makes me an interesting choice for today's message. Over the past few weeks, in our 5pm service, we've had a couple of special items aimed at highlighting how God's creativity is expressed through music. Today, we want to spend a bit more time exploring the whole concept of creativity. But this then raises an important question, am I – with no discernible musical talent – the right person for the job?!

I remember being asked this question in a different way some months ago. We used to have Creative Nights on a Thursday – when the musicians, singers, production and media team got together around rehearsals. I was there for another meeting. As people headed into Blue Space to start the night with worship, one of the team – who shall remain anonymous – invited me to come along. Which was nice. Except for how they phrased it. "I know you're not creative Phil, but do you want to join us".

I know you're not creative. Oh. Wow. Thanks. I'm not someone that is easily offended. I didn't take any offence at their words. But I'm also someone who closely studies what others say. Their words got me thinking. They came back to me when I started to prepare this, framing my thoughts for this message today.

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WE: How true is the assumption implied by that statement? Is it right to say that only those that are musical are creative? God's creativity is expressed through music, but is it only expressed through music?

I guess we know the answer to that is probably no. There are other ways we see creativity expressed. Through art, through graphic design, through architecture. But is that the limit of creativity? Is that all it applies to? The way I'm asking perhaps gives a sense that the answer may not be so cut and dried as that – but what basis is there for seeing it as something more?

We have an idea also of what creative people are like, don't we? There's their job or role, for want of a better word – they're musicians, artists, sculptors, designers, dancers. But there are character traits we associate with creativity too, right? Not all of them positive necessarily. They are dreamers and visionaries; non-conformist; out of the box; different. But also perhaps they're seen as temperamental, as flaky; divas; likely to demand space and time to create. Is that really what a creative person looks like? Is there a personality type that defines what a creative person is?

Today, I want to explore the nature of creativity. To ask what it looks like in an individual, to explore whether it is for some or for all. But I also want to ask what the function is of creativity. Why do we create? What's the point? This question matters because it helps to clarify the importance of creativity. Is it something that can happily left to a select few, or does it matter so much that it should be pursued by all? Should it be a main focus for us or an afterthought? Is it a fundamental drive, or an add-on to be explored once more important work is done? What value does it hold; and what value does it bring to those that pursue it? Is it a higher call or a distraction from what really counts?

[25]

GOD: To answer this question, in the words of Coldplay, "Oh let's go back to the start". Let's roll back to the dawn of time, to the start of it all, to the Biblical account of how all we now see came to be...

Genesis 1:1-3 - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

In the beginning, God created... That's how it all begins. It's how it starts. One of the first things we learn about God in the Bible is that He is creative. *The* first is that He was first. That before everything, God was there. But the next thing we learn is that God created. His creative nature is written in to His Word from the very start. God begins His creative act, forming the heavens and the earth, and then, LIGHT.

Imagine for a moment the contrast. The sudden change that the creativity of God introduces. To the formless and empty darkness, to the chaos of nothingness, God's creative voice speaks – and light breaks out. You don't even have to imagine. We can experience it here, if we take all the lights down **[LIGHTS DOWN]**, we are plunged into darkness. Then suddenly **[LIGHTS!]** LIGHT!

Striking isn't it, the contrast. The sudden introduction of God's creativity. The night to day difference that He makes. It is astounding to think, isn't it, that God formed the heavens and the earth – which would be impressive enough on its own – but God did it *in the dark!*

I'm joking, but there's a serious point. Some of you need to know that God's creativity begins in the darkness. **[SLOWLY TAKE LIGHTS DOWN]**. God does not need light to begin a creative work. He creates light as He works. Some of you need to hear this because you feel like you're in a dark place right now. Perhaps that applies to your mood or your emotions. Perhaps you've felt down, lethargic, listless or lacking energy. Perhaps you feel like your motivation has disappeared, like the spark of life has gone. Perhaps you feel as the earth was: "formless" – lacking direction or meaning – or "empty" – like there's something missing on the inside. It is important that you understand that the darkness is not a distraction to God. It does not imply His absence; and it does not limit His power to work. God begins His greatest work in darkness – perhaps He is beginning something in you too. He can speak to the formlessness and emptiness, to the darkness and discord. In darkness, God still works. And whether suddenly or slowly, God brings **[LIGHTS]** light.

As we read on in Genesis, we see the expansiveness of God's creativity. The creation of light is followed by the separate of sky and ocean, then dry ground is separated from sea. Next the land is covered with vegetation; before sun and moon are formed to govern day and night. Next God creates the creatures of the sea and air on the fifth day. On the sixth, the living creatures of the land – ending with humankind itself.

As we read the words of Genesis 1, we see how the creativity of God is not limited. It is not confined or constricted. It is expansive – covering everything we see and experience and feel. From the sky to the oceans to the land beneath our feet; from trees and plants to sun and moon; from birds and fish and livestock to us. This is an understanding of creativity that is unbridled in scale. It is far and wide – all finds its place within its scope. We should be very careful about limiting our understanding of creativity if all things find their place within God's creative act.

But what of us? What of our creativity? Where does that come in?

Genesis 1:26-28 - 26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God created humankind in His image. I love how this asserts that both male and female are made in the image of God. But what does that imply for our own creativity? Well, if practically the first thing we learn about God is that He is creative; and if all we see and feel and experience is an expression of His creativity; then surely to be made in His image means that we too have creativity hard-wired into us. It is imprinted on our design, woven into our being, embedded into the fabric of humanity – an essential element of who we are.

If we are created in the image of creative God, then we too are created to create. Creativity is not limited to a select few. It is not boxed in to an art form or a job role or a personality type. It is an intrinsic characteristic of humanity. It is encoded in our DNA. It is fundamental to what makes us human.

There is then a divine drive in each of us to create. And we can never be fully satisfied until we recognise it and engage with it. If we do not express creativity somehow, we are living a life less than the life we were created to live. I think that's why beautiful things stir such emotion within us. There is power when we hear a great song or see work of art. It may shock us, move us or inspire us – but creativity, in whatever form, speaks to us. It speaks to who we are. It calls to us to become who we were truly meant to be. We may limit that drive toward creativity. We may bind it up in social

constructs or imprison it in a misguided sense of self. We may dismiss it as someone else's calling. We will come to that in a minute. But we cannot deny it forever. There is a drive in us to create it. It should not be dismissed, it should be embraced. We were created in the image of the Creator – the God of Heaven and Earth who created ALL things – and we were created to create.

When we engage creativity then, we do not just get a sense of who we are, but we come to better understand who God is. Our creativity is an expression of God's divinity. It reminds us that the spark within came from Him. When we create, we draw closer to the God who began the creative act, who sustains it as surely as night becomes day and day turns into night. Creativity allows us to see God. When we are creative, it reminds us of that bit of Himself that God deposited in us.

God formed you, shaped you, and breathed His essence into you (Genesis 2:7). To quote Erwin McManus, who has written extensively and spoken widely about this topic, you are both a work of art and an artist at work. Indeed, don't just take my word for it. Let's hear Erwin McManus share a few words on this topic, from a talk he delivered for Lifechurch – used without checking for permission, but knowing they'd probably be OK with it...

[16.30]

[**VIDEO:** Lifechurch.tv Artisan Soul: Week 1 with Erwin McManus.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVzrs1oO98> from 27:37 – 30.43]

We are created to create; imagined to imagine; God designed you so that through your life the future of humanity could come into being. This is where the second aspect of our exploration of creativity begins to come into view.

[13.00]

YOU: It strikes me that those who already see themselves as creative may find those words most inspiring, but some who are unsure of how they are creative may struggle a bit more to understand these words apply to them. We are inspired about our inherent creativity, but how can that be expressed through our lives?

To answer that question, we need to understand not just the nature of creativity – not just creativity as part of who we are – but also the function of creativity – why we are created to create. We have talked about how creativity demonstrates the divine, but what purpose does that serve?

To answer that question, we need to go back again to Genesis 1. As we have explored, God speaks into the darkness. There is in this description of the Spirit of God “hovering over the waters” a sense of the formless chaos of nothingness. God’s answer to the darkness and disorder before the beginning of time is creativity. He shapes nothing into something, brings form into the chaos, speaks darkness into light. This then is the function of creativity. It is an answer to the disorder, an answer to the emptiness. It is an answer to the darkness of our world.

When we start to understand creativity in those terms, we glimpse a sense of the value of creativity; of its importance; and of how we can each demonstrate creativity in our own lives. We do not create simply for the sake of creating. We are not doing it to look good or look clever or look talented. We do not create to pass the time or to keep us occupied. We do not create for our own sense of ego or success. We create as an answer to the darkness and disorder. We create to form something better. We create to make a positive difference; to answer the emptiness, to bring something from darkness into light.

That calling is not confined to the artist and musician. It is not the sole preserve of the designer or the architect. We all see darkness around us, don’t we? We know of those who experience emptiness. We encounter the chaos of our world. Many are stumbling, unsure of their direction. Many have experienced injustice. Many lack purpose and meaning in life. Many are stuck in the depths of despair and depression. Many search for a sense of something in pursuits that will only cause them harm. Many long for hope. They search for belonging. They long to be loved, to be valued, to be known. You only have to turn on the news, open up a newspaper, load up a website or take a walk through our city to see the darkness in our world. These are trying times for many. Yet through creativity, we can make a change.

The question then is not if you are creative. We know that answer now. You are. We all are. It is hardwired into humanity, embedded into the essence of our being. The question is what will you create? And the answer is prompted by the darkness that you see and the difference that you want to make.

What is it that stirs within you when I mention darkness? What disorder springs to mind? What chaos? What is it that you have seen that you long to change? What is “not right”, not as it should be, less than the best? I doubt that I need to show you or force you to notice. You just need to take a moment

to consider – what’s that darkness you have seen or perhaps even have known?

That is the canvas for creativity. That is the context for your great creative work. That is the environment in which you can make a difference. It may look like making something beautiful. It may be that a work of art or piece of music can rouse something in someone. But we don’t just need creativity that is confined to the creative arts. Our world needs those who are creative in business; creative in finances; who can creatively make money and can come up with creative ways to make it work. We need creative voices in education; creative ideas in healthcare. We need people with insight and foresight to help invent new medicine, guide fresh therapy and develop new ways to deliver both. We need a creative spark to answer the great afflictions of our age – to address loneliness, disconnection, purposelessness and to help foster mental wellbeing, wholeness and personal growth. Creativity finds a way; makes a way. It defies what is in favour of what could be. There is scope for creativity whatever your sphere of influence; whatever the opportunities in front of you; whatever type of job you do and whatever type of person you are. It may be as simple as asking what could be done differently. “Is there a new idea that will change this situation? Is there a better way to approach this?”

We deliberately started this message with a protest song. It was not just to give me an opportunity to sing. I love artists through the ages have used their creativity to hold up a light to the injustice of their world. I love how designers and directors have done something similar through film. And how even how even corporations can stir a sense of something more with a creative approach. One powerful example of this is the new advertising campaign by Nike. I don’t know if you’ve seen it, so why don’t we take a look...

[7.30]

[**VIDEO:** Nike “Just Do It” 30 year anniversary advert.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hlc_epqfI0]

I love that advert. I love how a little creativity stirs something within us. Not so much in the visuals, but through the words and the examples – of those who have beaten adversity; of those who have made a difference in their world. The man narrating, the guy with the impressive hair, is Colin Kaepernick. He’s an American footballer who started a protest that resounded around the world, when he knelt for the National Anthem before matches. We can debate

the politics of that all we like. But what I love is the example it sets. Here is a man who made a difference, who sought to roll back the darkness, through his creativity. Not creativity in his chosen field – not on the football pitch – but before the game even began. He used the platform created by his talent, yes, but his most potent act was thinking outside the box. He saw the darkness of injustice and asked what difference he could make.

That then is the starting point for our creativity. It is where this journey must begin for us. We should not ask if we are creative, we should ask what difference we can make. Creativity has a function – from the beginning, the intention of creativity was to roll back the darkness and disorder of our world. So what's the darkness you see? And what's the difference you could make? Because there is no point trying to kick against the darkness, when instead we simply have to turn on the light.

[4]

In one of His most famous speeches – the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5, Jesus encourages us in this way...

Matthew 5:13-16 - 13 “Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. 14-16 “Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

Let me tell you why are you here. You’re here to bring out the God-flavours. To bring out the God-colours. You’re here to be light. To stand as an example of God’s kingdom. To show people a better way, a better life. To open up to them; and to see others open up to God.

Jesus emphasises that same purpose written into creation – to roll back the darkness and disorder, to shine a light. This again is a manifesto for creativity. A call to see the world not as it is but as it could be. What’s the darkness

you've faced? What's the darkness you see? How could you make a difference? How could you bring light?

I deliberately haven't spent too long today focusing on the specifics of how you might apply this. I've tried to throw out a few ideas, but more than that I wanted to stir something in you. I wanted you to know for sure that you are creative – it is in your nature, it hardwired into who you are. But we do not create simply for the sake of it. We create to make a difference. When we create, we follow in God's footsteps. We echo His actions. We reveal the divine. I don't want to limit your creativity with my ideas. I want it to run free and uninhibited to answer the challenges you see in your world. If we can just see that our creativity is the answer to the darkness, I believe that God can spark something powerful. Let's not ask if we're creative; let's ask what difference God can make through us.

When faced with challenges this week, let's see them as opportunities. When faced with difficulty, let's remember what we have learnt together today. When faced with darkness, let's ask God for insight. Let's pray – God, how can I shine a light in this situation? What difference can I make? I believe that is the start of a creative journey. It is the spark. The beginning. It is why creativity exists. God did not create just for the sake of it – but to roll back the darkness by introducing light.

[1]

[SLOWLY DIM THE LIGHTS]

US: As I draw things to a conclusion, I doubt we need to go looking for the darkness. I don't think we need to go too far to see disorder or to encounter emptiness. It is out there, barely beyond even these four walls. But there is hope. There is hope in God. Hope that is expressed through you. What might happen if we asked God for insight, to spark creativity within us? What if we asked Him to reveal a fresh way of doing things? A fresh approach, a fresh idea. Something we could initiate, design or create. Each act of creativity is an act of defiance. It is an antidote to the emptiness. An answer to the darkness. Each act of creativity is like turning on a light. **[Turn on light on phone].**

When one of us does this, it can make a small difference. But what if we each, in our given field, in our sphere of influence, wherever we have opportunity, began to do the same? What if we asked God to spark creativity within us? What if we sought insight, wisdom; a fresh approach or fresh ideas? **[Band begin to turn on lights on their phones].** It would start to make a difference

not just in one situation, wouldn't it? If light were going on across Norwich. In schools, at university, in workplaces; families and friendship groups. Creativity is not confined by personality. It is not limited by capability. It is not something that only certain people possess. It is hardwired into each of us; embedded so that we can make our world a better place. Do not ask if you are creative; ask how you can create; ask what can be done differently; ask what difference you can make.

Let's pray.