

Creativity

By Jamie Buckingham

I occasionally find myself sitting, staring, at the blank screen of my word processor—the creative juices dried like cornstalks in a winter field.

Often when faced with this horrible thing called “writer’s block” I go to my bookcase. The presence of greatness stimulates creativity. I read the opening sentences of Steinbeck’s *The Pearl*, Catherine Marshall’s *A Man Called Peter* or Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*. I then imitate until my pump is primed.

Imitation is at least 50 percent of the creative process. The growing child learns by imitating. Derek Prince said he was inspired into the healing ministry by watching a man with healing gifts lay hands on the sick. Standing over to one side, watching intently, he said to himself, “I can do that, too.” Almost instantly he moved from imitation to creation.

In the foreword to *They Speak With Other Tongues*, John Sherrill told how he learned to sing bass in the church choir. He could not sight-read, his range was narrow, his volume puny. But the choir needed men’s voices, so he joined.

Then one night at rehearsal he happened to take a chair directly in front of Bill Brogan, a big Irish bass. That night, as the Irishman’s magnificent voice boomed forward, John sang better than ever before. He commented on it. Bill said, “Next week I’ll show you something even better.”

The following week John sat next to the big man. Halfway through the Advent chorale Brogan said, “Lean into me.”

John said he leaned back until his shoulder blade was resting on Bill’s chest. “Suddenly I knew what singing was all about. The resonances of his deep voice swelled though my own; effortlessly I made tones I hadn’t known were in me...I had passed from intellec-



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tual inquiry, to the presence of the thing itself, and then on to something almost like physical contact.”

He had moved from imitation—to creation.

People shun creativity because they’re always looking for perfection. I often tell my writing classes: If a thing is worth writing, it’s worth writing poorly. If you wait until you are a crafted writer, you’ll never get anything on paper. Run the risk of rejection; for that’s how you learn. If you wait until you are ready, you’ll never even start. Start before you are ready and learn as you go. Receiving criticism of your poorly done stuff is God’s means of making you better.

The mature writer is never condemned nor devastated by criticism from either editor or reader. He welcomes it and is benefited by it. Confident in himself, he knows criticism can only bring improvement in creativity.

Others think once they get something right they should keep doing it that way forever. That, too, kills the creative process.

Jean Pierre Rampal, the master flutist, once said, “There are nights I play a piece perfectly...and the next night I play it better.”

Creativity is the search for a better way. The creative person is always ask-

ing, How can I improve? Such a question nearly always produces improvement. Neither geniuses nor nature do things the same way twice. Ruts are, indeed, graves waiting to be filled.

Creators are not bound by the concepts of logic that often bottom-lines with “It won’t work.” Creative people are always attempting the impossible.

My most creative sermons never come from my study. They come the morning after a disaster. They come in times of great crisis. They come during times of personal trauma. They come when I am angry. Or heartbroken. Or determined. They are almost always spontaneous. In short, I am at my best when, after immersing myself in the Word of God, I am stimulated by circumstances. I then allow the creative force of the Holy Spirit to work through me as I speak—or write.

Norman Vincent Peale once asked David du Plessis, “David, you travel all the time. When do you find time to prepare sermons?”

Du Plessis’ answer was classic: “I don’t prepare sermons. I prepare myself. Then the Holy Spirit does the preaching.”

One notion says you get ideas by sitting in a dark room and concentrating very hard. The opposite is true. Creative people know their greatest ideas come out of situations—from observing, from experiencing, from fearing, from feeling. Cultivate and stimulate the senses, and the mind begins to create. Put it in a dark vacuum, and it withdraws into itself and does no more than remember—and repeat.

Genuine creation grows out of a relationship with the Creator—who continues in us the process begun when the earth was without form and void. Seeds sown by God in the flowerpots of our minds will, when they sprout, always reproduce in the shape of the Source—not the pot. ■