

Creativity

Contributed by james
Saturday, 07 November 2009
Last Updated Saturday, 07 November 2009

this is a talk I gave in our church a while ago which describes some of my thoughts
Worshipping a Creative God
Intro

Good morning, you have seen me up here many times before but never preaching. I feel pretty nervous as I usually only feel comfortable when I am hiding behind a guitar or keyboard (or maybe these days twin turntables)

I was asked to speak on Worship, but not given a title so I have decided on $\frac{1}{2}$ Worshipping a Creative God $\frac{1}{2}$. I will admit that I have strayed rather onto creativity alone as well as creativity in worship.

As I was thinking and starting to pray I remembered some excellent tapes of a talk by David Ruis from the Vineyard that I lost after lending to a friend a number of years ago. I had tried many times to get them back but with no success. So not really expecting much I rang and had to leave a message with his wife as he was out. 10 minutes later he arrived with them at my door! I was really surprised and taking into account how disorganised he and his house is this encouraged me that God wanted me to speak on creativity, so I hope I manage to put across what God wants to highlight to us this morning. Some of this talk comes from those tapes.

I know that my main passion is music and I am concentrating on this aspect of creativity. Of course I recognise many other important streams of creativity and what I am saying is probably relevant to these as well, but still I am going to focus on music.

God the Creator

Genesis 1 1In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2Now the earth was $\frac{1}{2}$ formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3And God said, $\frac{1}{2}$ Let there be light, $\frac{1}{2}$ and there was light. 4God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5God called the light $\frac{1}{2}$ day, $\frac{1}{2}$ and the darkness he called $\frac{1}{2}$ night. $\frac{1}{2}$ And there was evening, and there was morning $\frac{1}{2}$ the first day.

God brought everything into existence but it is so hard to take in how awesome God's creativity is. The size of the universe is staggering. In all the Sci-Fi I can think of, the whole story remains in our 1 galaxy. Even at warp 9 it would take a space ship 70 years to cross it. It contains 100,000,000,000 stars like our own sun. And yet there are an estimated 100,000,000,000 galaxies, 1,000,000,000 have been mapped, each like our own.

But it is not just the size, but also the detail. The chemical reactions in one single animal cell are more complex than we have yet discovered and the detail of one atom is quite surprising. God is the God of too much. In the sea there are fishes and creatures we are yet to discover, God didn't just make a few birds, he made an incredible variety. There are animals in the Rain Forest yet to be found. There are too many beetles $\frac{1}{2}$ 380,000 different species. There are 50,000 types of weevils. And the quality of God's creation. Complex, beautiful, efficient, wonderful, vast, glittering, lush, stark, flamboyant.

Are we meant to be dull and passionless, boring and austere?

They created man in their image

So I got to wondering what is the nature of mankind, what did God make us like.

Genesis 1 27 So God created man in his own image,

in the image of God he created him;

male and female he created them.

God made us creative like himself. He made us tool-makers, musicians, artists. He made us to name and discover what he had created. He made us capable of decisions, thoughtful, inventive, complex, sometimes confused, able to determine right and wrong - capable but not often successful.

I found it interesting that in the garden of Eden the only creativity I noticed was naming the animals which was probably quite hard to decide really good names. But after the fall we made clothes 3:21 - actually God made them the first time, we worked the land 3:17 but we were forced to or starve, we starting playing music 4:21, we made tools from metals 4:22, and we were making boats 6:14 with design advice from God.

The final vision in Revelation of mankind in Heaven is not a return to the Garden of Eden i½ naked with nature. But in Rev 21: 9-21 a Holy City of God i½s people with God himself living there. A colourful creative city, the walls made of Jasper, the city of pure gold, with foundations decorated with precious stone and gates of pearls.

The g g g grandson of Cain was called Jubal.

Genesis 4 19Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. 20Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. 21His brother i½s name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. 22Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of i½ bronze and iron.

What happened here? Somehow all harp and flute players, possibly all musicians are descended from this man. Did God mess around with this man i½s chromosomes in some fancy way and out popped a musician. Am I a descendent of Jubal. It does seem clear to me that God gave us music.

All creativity comes from God

I find it also interesting that many non-Christian musicians have come to the same conclusion as they can i½t explain it any other way. I met a musician once who was visiting our church. He had found it previously insulting when people said that his music came from some higher source than himself. Then he slowly realized as he saw the passion and inspiration in other peoples music that he was missing and he was searching for that. He had came along to church with the main aim to try and make his music better. To touch the Creator, the source of creativity.

A few years ago on a Friday I had just had a call that my mother was very seriously ill i½ sent home basically to die. That afternoon as I got ready to travel to see her, I sat at my keyboard and played a piece and recorded it. Not just piano, but an arrangement of guitar, strings and flute. I just played it straight, no thinking, no preparation. I still am confused as I listen to it. There are complexities to the harmony I had not dreamed of. I don i½t think I could compose a piece like that. Yet full of sadness and emotion it just came out of my soul straight onto the recording. Maybe coming straight out of God i½s heart. I think most musicians recognize this i½ Christian or non-christian.

Lets look at Revelation 18 verse 21-24. Babylon in the bible usually represents the kingdom of rebellious man or the Kingdom of the Devil. At the end of all time With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. I think I am still prone to thinking that in Hell there may be something attractive, loud music, free sex, gambling, danger, excitement, really wild things. But this passage says there will be no music. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. In Hell there will be no creativity, no art, no houses, no furniture, no gadgets, nothing even to sit on. Maybe we i½ll just float. Satan cannot create, only misuse or misdirect. All that is expressive, inventive, creative, is from God. When finally those who reject God are sent with the Devil to Hell, all that is of God will be taken away from them. And I see now that that will really be Hell.

As I have said to be creative is not just the arena of the musician and artist. Anyone who creates, who makes, who designs, who invents, some new combination, new thought, is using God i½s creativity or the creativity God has given them. Look around this room we are in. The building has been created to be functional and to look pleasing, the wood has been carved, painted, glass coloured, floors varnished, the raw materials of metal, paint, plaster created by us. Even the most analytical of us are creative in what we do. It is probably one of the main characteristics of Mankind and it all comes from God.

God i½s anointing in the world

Does this passage then suggest that God i½s creativity is running through all music, non-Christian or Christian. I i½m not saying that all non-Christian music is good as such. There is of course a lot of rebellion against God in it, but also something of God.

I was thinking about what the common themes of popular songs are (possible all song ever). I came up with two main ones. One is about boy meets girl love, the other about dissatisfaction with life and looking for more. Both of these themes can be very close to the themes of worship music.

Sometimes God i½s anointing seems to really shine through a song written by someone who doesn i½t actually know Jesus. For instance there was a 70 i½s band called foreigner who wrote the song i½ I want to know what love is i½. I have heard of a number of people becoming Christians through that particular song, but not daring to admit it to other Christians (words on acetate). Something in it is speaking of and leading people to God, although it was written by a non-

believer. There is so much searching in popular music for an answer to life, the universe and everything, sometimes of course suggesting wrong and misleading answers.

Another examples i ½ One of the Spice Girls, Mel C had this hit in the charts just recently. The words are excellent and I think this would be a great worship song (words on acetate). I know she has a large Celtic cross tattooed on her shoulder, but li ½ve not heard that she is a Christian and some of the words imply this is about love for another person. But our love relationships have a lot of similarities to our love relationship with Jesus i ½ like in Song of Songs.

A lot of things will end eventually pass away, but music and singing will continue forever as we worship our creator. There is singing in heaven as in Revelation 14 & 15. In Ecclesiastes 3: 11 it says i ½He has also set eternity in the hearts of men i ½. In the same way there is a longing in all men and women to sing the songs of heaven.

I would like to mention a number of examples in the bible of God i ½s Spirit anointing non-believers.

1. 1 Samuel 19: 18-24. Saul was intent on killing David. Murder was in his heart, yet

23So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. 24He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel i ½s presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, i ½ls Saul also among the prophets? i ½

2. In Exodus 35 verse 32 it says i ½ that the LORD has chosen Bezalel an Israelite 31and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts. Yet In 1 Kings 7:13-22 Solomon chose a man called Hiram to make the decorations for the first temple of God. His mother was an Israelite but his father was from Tyre, not from the chosen people. And yet he had the best skills, he was presumably filled with the Spirit of God to make objects which would then be in the holy of holies, the most sacred place of God.

3. In numbers 22 v 30 God even prophecies to Balaam through his donkey. God i ½s anointing and his creativity will through who he wants.

Musical Styles i ½Music was my first love i ½

I want to go on now to styles of music. Too many times still I have heard Christians saying some style of music or beat or instrument is of the Devil or just silently rejecting it.

What sort of music is acceptable in church to worship God?

I feel there are two main principles in tension.
All styles used to worship God

The first one is from what I have been saying so far. All creativity comes from God and so I think that all styles of music could be used to worship God although the origins of that style may be impure. We have our acoustic guitar based folk music in this church, which we use to worship God and it is good. Do we look at heavy rock or at techno dance music and say that there is something wrong about the music - it isn i ½t Godly and can i ½t be used to worship, or do we just say that it isn i ½t for us.

The club scene over the last 10-15 years has been one of the most significant factors in the development of the culture of the 18-35 year old people in England i ½ the so-called Generation X. This culture included dancing all evening, drugs mainly ecstasy and a sense of everyone being everyone i ½s friend with of course plenty of sex which is common to any grouping of young people or just any grouping of people i ½ A good film to visualize this is Human Traffic. But if someone from this background converts to Christianity should they also convert to our musical expression and our culture. Our nicer, holier folk music i ½ based on the culture and music of the late 1960 i ½s with plenty of drugs i ½ LSD which is probably more harmful, and even more freer sex, but less dancing, eastern religions, a rebellion against the past cultural rules! I think we sometimes mistake our church music for holy music instead of it just being a previous secular style. Probably the origins of all styles of music are impure like the people who created them. Where did the old hymns come from? I know that some of them at least came from German pub drinking songs.

We sometimes seem to believe that if everyone in our country acted like a Christian, spoke like a Christian, looked like a Christian, sang Christian songs and played Christian music then the place would be a whole lot better. But NO i ½ the sin would continue and the whole thing much boring and plain i ½ sounds quite horrific to me actually. We shouldn i ½t try to change people from the outside in, the gospel works from the inside out. What we need is Jesus in the center of our life, obedience and love is the most important. Idolatry is the biggest problem. We need to redeem all this creativity, not kill it off i ½ leading to blandness and lack of passion in the church. And more strikingly still - whenever the church is in a state of revival then it tends to sing music from the culture of the time. This has happened again and again throughout the history of the church.

I first started listening to music in 1981, when I was 16 and joined a small social club. We had twin record players and

took it in turns to DJ. Every month 100 of us packed in this small room and danced all evening. I think in some ways I have been looking to recapture this ever since. We listened to Duran, Deplete Mode, Madness, David Bowie, The Jam. I came to University in Bristol in 1983 and became a Christian in 1984 and came that week to this church. I loved the atmosphere, the meeting with God, the supernatural, the friendships and community - and I've enjoyed the music and the worship but it has never really been my music, my roots, the music I am passionate about. It's more like my older sisters music! I converted to Jesus, not 60's folk.

I do understand that to have a service with a wide range of people of different ages and backgrounds there needs to be an appropriate music, probably of a rather middle of the road sound. This is important and good. But I do sometimes long to express myself to God with others in an expression more of my background. I can and have worshipped God through many styles of music, but some styles are closer to my heart and I can express myself deeper through them.

I have tried to keep us in this church in touch with the songs the youngsters are listening to so that in 20 years time we won't all be 50 with no younger people here, singing the same style songs as now and being sidelined as younger churches take over just as we did to older churches in the early 1980's. I know I have started these electro-dance worship evenings. I didn't do this primarily for the youngsters I did it for myself. It may be just a little fun or it may be something very significant in God's plan I don't know. I fear it is just my pride and passion out of control but I pray to keep this pure worship.

The Mix at Woodlands every month has louder rock worship and is aimed at teenagers. But I know many 20 year olds and 30's who go there as it is the only place they feel at home. The idea that they would move on to the adult celebration meeting as they get older just isn't going to happen. It's not their place.
Be aware of Associations

I mentioned a while back, two principles in tension. The first was that all creativity comes from God.

The second is to do with associations. What Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 8 is relevant to this and quite clear. There are associations attached to these musical styles and some of this is really bad news and obviously evil in God's eyes. We may feel able to play this music, use the style, beats, patterns and instruments without the associated bad culture affecting us. We also may not be able to put it aside, so that it leads us into sin so we should avoid it. It is also clear from Paul that either way we shouldn't judge someone else who comes to another conclusion. I myself would like to redeem and keep all musical creativity for God and use it to worship him. This however may not always be wise.
Other tensions

There are a number of other factors which may influence whether certain music is good for us. Certain styles or beats are said to be repetitive or hypnotic, in a bad way I am not sure what to say on this. I love dancing to these repetitive beats and find it clears my mind so that I can focus on God.

Maybe this also depends not on the music but our hearts on whether it is beneficial or harmful. Other factors to consider which I haven't time or possible answers - are whether evil spirits can lurk in music. How much rebellion in the words or style can we cope with?

This is a little thought of mine - Some things are powerful some are less so. The powerful things can do more bad, but if done right can do even more good.

Just of note - Is there even a pure secular music? The origins of most modern popular music goes back to a triad of styles called the Blues/Boogie/Gospel family. This was an inseparable mixture of Christian and non-Christian music and this first came out of Big Gospel Camps in the mid 1800's in the USA when blacks and whites met together.
One last point

All creativity belongs to God and should flourish in the church. But very creative artists often don't fit in well in a church as their ideas can be too new and different for us to cope with. But God loves these people and the creative work they do. God always wants Christian artists to be part of a church although they may need to express their creativity in a wider arena.

The church may not be the best place, but it is the only safe place.

This is of course true for the lone evangelists or intercessors that we sometimes meet as well.
Conclusion

This is a big subject I have touched upon with many other aspects I have missed out. You may not agree with some of my conclusions. Do come and talk to me further if you would like. I have prepared a bible study for cell church about - Why do we sing new songs? which is closely related to what I have said today, but looks at it from a different angle.

I am not planning any dramatic changes in our church's worship although I am doing some experimenting in and out

of the services. My main aim is to help us meet God himself during our time together. This is my heart ĩ½ to meet God in worship. Steve Smith said a few weeks ago - are we thirsty for the Holy Spirit like we thirsty for water.

James Bragg

Acetates for talk

creative [kri ĩ½ytiv] adjective

1. new and original: using or showing use of the imagination to create new ideas or things
ĩ½ a creative approach to the problem of space

2. able to create: able to create things

3. resourceful: making imaginative use of the limited resources available

4. FINANCE intentionally deceptive about financial information: employing deceptive methods to distort financial records (ironic)

ĩ½ creative accounting

ĩ½ creative bookkeeping

ĩ½ GOD 2000

Foreigner : I Want To Know What Love Is

Got to take a little time

A little time to think things over

Better read between the lines

In case I need it when ĩ½m older

This mountain I must climb

Feels like the world upon my shoulders

Through the clouds I see love shine

It keeps me warm as life grows colder

In my life there ĩ½s been heartache and pain

I don ĩ½t know whether I can face it again

Can ĩ½t stop now ĩ½ve travelled so far

To change this lonely life

I want to know what love is

I want you to show me

I want to feel what love is

I know you can show me

ĩ½m gonna take a little time

A little time to look around me

I've got nowhere left to hide
It looks like love has finally found me

There's talk about love

Love that you feel inside

I'm feeling so much love

Love you just can't hide

Melanie C : I Turn To You

When the world is darker than I can understand

When nothing turns out the way I planned

When the sky turns grey and there's no end in sight

When I can't sleep through the lonely night

I turn to you

Like a flower leaning toward the sun

I turn to you

'Cos you're the only one

Who can turn me around when I'm upside do

I turn to you

When my insides are wrecked with anxiety

You have the touch that will quiet me

You lift my spirit

You melt the ice

When I need inspiration

When I need advice

Where would I be?

What would I do?

If you'd never helped me through

I hope someday if you've lost your way

You could turn to me like I turn to you

I turn to you

When fear tells me to turn around

I turn to you

Pop Adult New Romantic Teen Chart Euro Dance Ambient D 'n' B Trance Balaeric Techno Breaks & Beats Hard House House Trip Hop Electro Disco Eclectic Garage UK Garage Leftfield Rock Emo Classic Contemporary Punk Hardcore/Noise Rock n' Roll Soft/AOR Thrash Gothic Experimental Rock Alternative Rock Metal Industrial Indie Alternative Indie Indie Rock Lo-fi Urban R & B Nu Soul Soul Funk Hip Hop No Skool Nu Skool Old Skool Classical Orchestral Chamber Opera Choral Contemporary Experimental Instrumental Vocal Global Spanish Arabic Asian Mediterranean African Eastern European South American New Age Instrumental New Age Meditation Jazz Big Band Fusion Latin Acoustic Modern Free / Avant-garde Jazz Funk Mainstream Swing Blues & Country Blues Traditional Country Folk Acoustic Singer Songwriters Easy Listening Lounge Orchestral Reggae Dub Ska Roots TwoTone

Points I would like to send people away with

Recognise and respect the wide scope of creativity in music, art, crafts, building, design, technology, words, speech ĩ½

All creativity from God ĩ½ see and accept the creativity in all mankind ĩ½ while being wary of the added rebellion (us and non-christians)

Accept the non-christians affirming their God-given qualities and drawing them and pointing them to God the source of their creativity.

We can be relevant to the world without smudging our principles.

Redeem everything for God (well not quite everything).

The Church may not be the best place, but it is the only safe place

Questions

1. Should all creativity have a purpose or is it OK in itself?

2. a. In what ways are each of you creative ? (for you are) share and encourage each other in this. God loves your creativity and what you do.
b. How can you find an outlet for your creativity in or outside of the church, and how can you give or dedicate it to God.
c. Can this creativity help you to worship God or meet God?