

{ abundant life }

W O M E ,



C E A T I V E ?

CREATIVITY'S NOT JUST FOR ARTISTS —
AND IT'S GOOD FOR YOU.
HERE'S WHY.

BY JANE RUBIETTA

When I heard the ice-breaker question for our women's event, I groaned. "Talk about how you're creative," our leader chirped. When my turn came, I said, "I don't consider myself creative."

My friends were actors, painters, musicians, advertising experts. I didn't share their gifts; my stick figures cast doubt on research suggesting an equal distribution of creativity. I didn't paint, write music, or sing.

But **creativity**, I've since learned, isn't limited to painting, composing, or sculpting. Part of my problem was my understanding of **creativity**. Professor and author Maxine Hancock suggests creativity is "finding new ways of putting existing components together to make a whole." If something gives life, it's creative.

None of us was bypassed when God doled out creativity. So you don't whittle wood or whistle arias? Don't count yourself out—creativity goes beyond the high-profile artistic forms, or even the dexterous use of duct tape.

Yet today we're so busy keeping our families, churches, and communities running, or pursuing holiness, godliness, and people-pleasing, that we're exhausted. So we shove creativity to the margins, deeming it frivolous and unnecessary.

In talking to women all over the country, I hear a frustrated refrain: *I'm too tired, too strapped with all the demands on me. I want out.* And many do get out—by abandoning their faith, marriage, dreams, family, or job; or by abusing substances or using endless hours of television to dull their aches . . . anything to fill the gap created by the disconnect between their creative yearnings and their life.

CREATIVE TO THE CORE

The good news is we're *all* creative. We each bear the creative imprint of God's DNA, who said when we were created, "This is amazing, outstanding, the pinnacle of my handiwork! Yes, yes, yes!" Others translate God's words as, "It was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

God made something out of nothing—the ultimate form of creativity—by bringing into existence an entire universe. Then God made us, according to Scripture, in his image. Creativity is a base component in our makeup, inherent in our very being. We're designed to live creatively, regardless of our day job, living situation, income flow, or any repressed fear of Super Glue.

Psychological tests confirm this. Author Alex Osborn writes, "An analysis of almost all the psychological tests ever made points to the conclusion that

creative talent is normally distributed—that all of us possess this talent."

BEYOND SONGS AND SEQUINS

Creativity is a matter of fact. We're all artists of sorts, attempting to interpret life through our words, actions, and work. By living out our God-breathed, God-reflecting creativity, we bring him glory and point others to him. So the question isn't *Am I creative?* but rather *How do I tap into this God-given trait?* A good starting point is understanding the wild and wide varieties of creativity.

Creativity goes beyond arts-and-crafts and fun with sequins. It's keeping a budget; juggling relationships and needs; balancing hearth, home, and workplace; putting hundreds of meals on the table each year. Resourcefulness, ingenuity, and inventiveness are hallmarks of this trait.

Creativity's evident in actions, hospitality, atmosphere. It shows up in relationships, too. When Jim proposed to Cinda on Christmas, he wrapped her gifts in separate boxes, composed poetry for each gift, and arranged them on the frozen lake in front of her home. Each gift led to the next one, ending with the tiny box containing an engagement ring.

Creativity often shows up in a pinch. Too often I remember at the last minute that I need to prepare a meal. I run to the kitchen singing the Rubietta rendition of the Mother Goose rhyme: "I went to the cupboard, and the cupboard was bare!"

Minutes later, like Merlin the magician, I place an unlikely concoction on the dinner table. Sometimes it's all the same color or requires a vitamin to make it a balanced meal. But this seat-of-the-pants creation satisfies me—and feeds my family.

Likewise, you don't have to be a professional writer to use words to build others up. Mother Teresa said, "We are all pencils in the hand of God." And God needs all our pencils to write life, love, and laughter in the void in people's lives. My friend Marge's ministry is writing letters; God has encouraged countless people through her gift. Another friend, Rich, can discuss hard issues with others and never lose his temper. Relationships wither under harshness but blossom with tender words. That's creativity.

BEAUTY FROM PAIN

A creative response to life may mean turning pain into a positive or finding a way out of a constricting

NURTURE YOUR CREATIVITY

START WITH THESE 8 STEPS:

1. BE CURIOUS. Albert Einstein said, "I have no special gift. I am only passionately curious. The important thing is not to stop questioning. Imagination is more important than knowledge." To boost creativity, ask "Why?" or "How does that work?" or "How did you learn that?" Challenge assumptions. Take an opposing viewpoint on an issue.

2. REFLECT. When you journal your feelings and experiences—listening to and looking at the world around you with new eyes and ears—you can jump-start creativity. In addition, writing's rote hand movement reputedly frees your creative brain.

3. EXERCISE. Possibly due to changes in brain chemistry, aerobic exercise increases creativity. In addition to releasing mood-elevating endorphins, new ideas, combinations, and solutions stream along with increased blood flow. See what happens in 20 minutes a day!

4. BE SPONTANEOUS. Control is one of the enemies of creative living. When you're not afraid to play, shift gears in midstream, or change plans, your spontaneity can liberate creativity.

5. LAUGH. Stress management writer Vatche Bartekian says, "The more I've watched the connection between humor and creativity, the more I've realized there is very little difference between the terms 'Ahal' and 'Ha Ha!'" A good laugh can be the prelude to a good idea.

6. TRY A DIFFERENT ROUTE. New sights, sounds, and places encourage your mind to make new creative connections. Mix it up! Take the back roads home. See where you end up.

7. FEEL YOUR FEELINGS. In 1717, Alexander Pope said in *Eloisa to Abelard*, "He best can paint them who shall feel them most." Clueing into the internal world enhances your creativity, clears your mind, and opens you to possibility.

8. GRAB SOME SHUT-EYE. Sleep deprivation shuts down problem-solving skills. —J.R.

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situation. Psychologist Rollo May writes that creativity "arises out of the struggle of human beings with and against that which limits them." If, as author Karen Mains says, creativity is "the ability to get away from the main track, break out of the mold, or diverge from the rest of society," then creativity is a primary trait of people of faith who refuse to let the world squeeze them into its mold (Romans 12:2). Creativity means taking risks, allowing God to surge forward through the opening.

Art museums, concert halls, and the patent office pulse with the works and names of people who refused to let limitations constrain them. After a childhood marred by abuse, Beethoven was completely deaf at age 46. Yet he went on to write some of his greatest compositions, including five symphonies. A blind Milton penned *Paradise Lost*. Rescued from her dark silent world by a loving teacher, Helen Keller spent her life giving hope not only to the blind and deaf, but to the rest of the world as well. These people refused to be limited by life's setbacks.

So much of creativity is choosing to look for—and celebrate—life in the midst of what feels like death. Attitude converts limitations into actions and creativity. When we're most limited, God is most free. So you got bad news? Your project was turned down, you missed the promotion, or your car engine blew up? Fix a celebration meal, acknowledge your disappointment, and choose to view your status as a vital next step in God's great adventure for your life.

Our self-imposed limitations stifle creativity more than circumstances. In fact, the deeper our need or more desperate we are, the more creative we tend to be. If the mother of invention is necessity, then adversity is a real boost to creative genius. Grieve your wounds, then decide to use your pain for good—to make a difference in a world starved for visible expressions of the invisible God.

REAPING THE REWARDS

Creativity gives God glory, and expressing ourselves creatively reaps personal benefits as well. A creative "workout" lowers stress, builds self-confidence, and increases life enjoyment. It may also affect immune function, improve health, and lengthen your life. Remember your pride at bringing a special project home from school? Many groups and retirement centers include craft time in meetings because of such benefits.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of developing our creativity is that it brings us closer to the heart of God—whether or not we're wearing a paint smock. tew

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