10 Ways To Stir The Waters Of Your Creativity

Over the years I have come to firmly believe that every human being is "creative" in some way, shape, or form. By *creative*, I mean that we all have the capacity to create – to *make* things – that serve needs and incarnate dreams in everyday life.

According to the Hebrew bible, human beings were *created*, *made*, in what theologians call the *imago Dei*, or the "image of God" (Gen. 1:20-23). While there are different ways to understand this phrase, we can safely say there is something about the most Creative Being in the universe that we each reflect in our character, imagination, and vocation in the world.

There is right-brained and left-brained creativity, musical and culinary creativity, technological and medical creativity, visual and relational creativity, and many other forms of creative action. Some of my friends get shivers up and down their spine when they design a masterful Excel spreadsheet. Other friends of mine find their greatest works of art emerge when they see the moments they have helped to make beautiful in the twilight years of the elderly.

Creativity is God's gift to us; it is his gift *in* us, through which we can interact with the world in wonderfully fresh, enlivening, and healing ways.

Creativity And The Metaphor Of Water

Over the years, I've conversed with my friends and colleagues about their creative process. I've worked as an artist myself, in a wide variety of visual, written, and musical media. One of the best metaphors I've ever found for describing what seems to be the nature of the creative process is the metaphor of water.

Specifically, creativity is like water *in motion.* Dynamic. Moving. Flowing.

Some Scriptures about water in motion come to mind when I think of how creativity works within us.

- **In Genesis 1:2**, we are told that the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the waters at creation – the waters representing chaos and disorder in the Hebrew cosmology. The creative *word*, the creative act, speaks into the nervous void and brings order and voice to the inexpressible, the chaotic.

  The creative word makes the makes the chaos accessible – and even useful as creative media. Waters are separated from waters, stars spin, and mountains rise – a creative initiative orders chaotic elements and brings them to an elegant, wild, peaceful *order*.

- **In Genesis 4:21**, *Jubal*, the first musician mentioned in the Scripture, has a name that means "stream" (another meaning is "the blast of a ram's horn," and "he who runs"). In other words, a sense of flow, of motion (the opposite of stagnation), and prophetic proclamation (the opposite of silent resignation), speaks of the active and free movement so vital to inspiring music, art, and innovation.

  That the first musician would have a name so connected to water in motion (and compelled proclamation), gives us a clue as to how the creative process works.

- **In John 5:1-15**, we see a man healed by Jesus at the Pool of Bethesda, where from time to time the waters would be stirred by an unseen angelic hand. As legend had it, when the waters of the pool were stirred by an angel (meaning "messenger") the first person to immerse their body in the pool would experience divine healing.

  Whether or not anyone actually got healed in that pool is not the point. Jesus' act of healing the man

beside the pool, in my humble opinion, is meant to remind us that our best healing "spots" are a good place for God to find us when he's ready to do a miracle. I primarily see this pool as a metaphor for the stirred waters of creativity. The celestially stirred waters in this passage remind me of the act of creation in Genesis, and moving waters always mean that God may be near.

Using our metaphor, imagine that the "messenger" in this case is you and your creative work. As the waters are stirred in you, you stir waters to which others come for healing. In my experience of the creative process, I have become convinced that healing of the soul can occur during creative work – if we *immerse* ourselves in the process. Healing happens in the artist *as* we create, and then secondarily can heal those who *participate* in the art.

I believe that Christ is the Healer behind all transformations, but creativity plays a vital role in creating an environment for healing, revelation, and soulful epiphany. Creative work can be a place where the "angel stirs the waters," and we are healed in the baptism.

Getting The Stream Flowing Within

So, let's say that creativity can be spoken of as a flowing *with*, a flowing *from*, and a *flowing to* God – like a stream – that energizes both the giver and the receiver. There is a "stream" in all of us, whether our creativity is right-brained, left-brained, hair-brained, or whole-brained!

Whether we create with food, with people, with music, with typography or with cityscapes, we all have a stream inside that that is designed to flow *from* and *to* our Maker.

Our creativity is at its healthiest when we are in this giving, and receiving, posture. For the one who has put their faith in Christ, we could say that we are flowing with God in his creative river when we innovate, experiment, and play creatively under his Lordship and for his new creation purposes.

10 Ways To Stir The Waters Of Your Creativity

Here are some ideas I learned from others that keep the healing waters of my own creativity stirred. I hope that some of the patterns I'm attempting to keep going in my own life inspire you to think of your own.

We want to swell the river of our creativity in wet seasons, and feed the river of our creativity in dry seasons. We want to create the conditions for rain by daily and weekly habits and patterns that help make the clouds pregnant with God's precipitation.

1. Own That You Only Have One Life To Live

- Recognize your limitations and restrictions, recognize your capacity and opportunity, and maximize the season of life you are in. The rhythms will change – don't wish this time away. You are where you are for a reason.
- Listen for "Impact Moments" – moments where you are naturally touching people in a profound way, without having to drum it up. Note those moments, and what the creative work is that you're doing. Then, do more of that.
- Embrace that when you die, you will no longer be doing creative work with, or for, anyone in this life. In other words, make the time to create – don't wait for it to arrive. Leaving a legacy often starts with a decision. I asked my father to briefly answer 10 questions about his life for his grandchildren, via email. A few months later, he handed me a book – his memoirs – for our family. Time passes quickly. Create.

2. Clear A Space, Make It Yours

- Quotes enlarged and dignified with a frame can inspire you. Hang them on the walls where you create.

- Creative magazines and books that move you can be kept in eyesight, or even reach, should you need to flip through them in a creative moment. I keep a massive book on my desk, called *The Art Of Looking Sideways*, for inspiration moments.
- An aesthetic that is practical, but also triggers you, renews you, and ignites energy in you is the space you want to create (ex. room design, desk, wall hangings, candles, music, sunlight, airflow).

3. Change Up Your Reading Materials

- All work and no play dulls the razor's edge – find your sharpeners and get those pieces in your heart and mind.
- Read different materials to open up different sides of you (ex. I read *Wired Magazine* – I am inspired by technological innovation and the design of the magazine, *Fast Company* – I am inspired by business innovation and what makes creative minds tick, and anything by Alfred Lord Tennyson – I love dense, elusive poetry and sentences mothered to perfection).
- Ask others in your area of creative passion to feed you their best resources.

4. Create Like Your Soul's Health Depends On It

- Your creative work is not a luxury; it is your language of prayer. Pray often.
- Your creative work is a psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual outlet.
- Your daily work is enhanced and enlarged by your creative forays in other spheres. We all become richer when you are richer inside.

5. Use The Rhythms Of A Week

- Over time, certain spaces in your week reveal themselves as your optimal time for creative work. Name them, and plan to create during those times.
- Leverage those unique times by making a system that moves you with increased inertia toward your goals. (Goal setting is overrated. A goal says "I will write a book this year." A system says, "I will write in the early am, for 30 minutes, focusing on one chapter per week, toward a rough draft by the end of this month. When you succeed one day, you have positive reinforcement for the next.)
- Lace your work day with moments of creative inspiration, as able. Pause at lunch, every day, to read a blog by someone with whom you connect. If you're a graphic designer, take a Pinterest break.

6. Become Demanding About Your Time (Within Reason)

- *You don't have to watch a movie every weekend.* God may be making other demands on your time – don't let the enemy of your soul steal your precious hours with "entertainment." Movies can inspire you; they can also rob you blind of your time and imagination. In turn, they rob us of you and the gift we need you to give.
- Using a Reminder or Notes app, document books and materials you would like for birthdays or holidays (ex. I ask for infographic and typography books, as well as subscriptions and music lessons from pros), then present your list when ready.
- Resist invitations if they will collide with your system. Even if they are fun. The impulse to break the system for a short-term reason will be the death of your progress. It's time to take control of your time – or you will wake up finding that you're still talking about that next project instead of actually *doing* it.

7. Invest In The Tools Of Your Trade

- A quality instrument, as a musical example, is a tool that speaks back to you, prophesies to you, moves you. It changes your songwriting. A great cutting board and quality knives matter for someone who loves the culinary arts. A good soldering iron for someone who builds guitar pedals is a must. Cheap is

not always the way to go. Save money toward those quality tools that serve your central calling in creativity. Ask for gifts to be directed toward that tool, and for spouses, plan your budget around mutually supplying those tools for one another as able.
- Talk to others who model aspects of what you'd like to become in your work. Ask them what tools they've invested in. I have a folder in my web browser just for music videos. I note the tools they are using to create a sound, and the way they are playing.
- Lessons are another "tool of the trade," and are a system that always yields better results than a goal. Create a system of lessons, or growth events in your area of creativity, then invest in them as able. Even *one lesson*, for *one hour*, with someone strong in your field can change the direction of your work for years to come. It's also a perfect birthday gift for someone to give you.

8. Get In The Mode, To Get In The Mood

- Sometimes you have to start the creative process in order to want to *do* the creative process. Use triggers like listening to recordings if you're about write songs, reviewing physical and digital archives before you do design, or reading a book to get you going on a writing track.

9. Leverage Moments That Will Never Come Again

- One night I had booked a 2 camera video shoot for some training videos I was creating, and my video guy told me he had a new dolly track he wanted to try out. I immediately thought, *music video*. That night I wrote lyrics, worked them to a fine point with my 20-year old daughter, worked the song till she found a harmony, and rehearsed the lyrics till we knew them by heart. The next morning, we did the video. We were exhausted, but we are glad we did it.

10. Tame The Beast To Get The Best From Yourself

- Just because you *can* create it, doesn't mean you *should*. Great ideas will come again and again, and from own creative business experience I can assure you, even those ideas you are absolutely *sure* God has spoken – that have heat and innovation all over them – may not amount to almost anything if you do them. I've woken up in the middle of the night with ideas I saw through till morning. In the end, as I look back, very few had any impact on me or beyond me. The sleep would have served me better than the personal growth. I think.
- At the end of the day, decide to stop recording ideas when the recording of them will distract you from something else. I even ask permission to record an idea on car rides. If your creative impulse is always disrupting family or other activities (mine often does) then it's not worth giving in to it in my experience. I create quick voice memos of ideas I don't want to lose for listening to later. But if even that is irritating to your spouse or others, don't do it. All will be well.

Keep Those Waters Moving

Keeping the waters of our creativity moving takes intention, planning, and sacrifice. But there is no better way to live.

There will be seasons in your life when you can give more time to your creative flow than others. For example, if you are in your teens or twenties, *now* is the time for you to invest in, and hone to greatness, your craft. In your 30s, 40s, 50s, and beyond, you can still do it – but it just gets harder to find the energy and time.

There is no age that marks you being too old, or too far behind, to get started again in most creative areas (even older people can participate in forms of dance).

Say no to stagnant waters of creativity in your life or heart, and get moving again. As you do, you'll sense the Spirit of God hovering over the waters of your spirit, and moving those waters – and you – at his pleasure.

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EBook reference: The Elemental Life: The Earth, Wind, Fire, And Water Of The Passionate Spiritual Life

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