

“Character Tour--Creativity”

The character quality I am going to talk about today does not make most character quality lists. In fact, go on the Internet. Jump on a search engine, like Google. Type in “character traits.” You are not going to find this on most of the lists. The reason is because a lot of us are intimidated and frightened by it. A lot of us don’t realize that this is a major player in the whole “character” thing. I’m talking about the character quality of creativity.

You see this is important because creativity is intrinsically woven into the very fabric and framework of who God is. It doesn’t make most of our character quality lists, but it is foundational in the life of a follower of Christ. But when I say the word “creativity,” I know what happens. Most of us are bombarded with excuses as to why we don’t have any creativity. Our brains are bombarded and we turn these excuses over and over on the rotisserie grills of our minds.

“I’m not creative. I’ve never had an original thought. I can’t sing, dance, write or do video. I’m just not creative.” But that’s a very limited view of creativity. When you or I say things like that, we are making a mockery of God’s artistic genius, because the Bible says that we are made in the image of God, God is a God of creation, which means that in you and me is a reflection of that creative potential. We all have the potential to be innovative individuals. So, let’s start freeing this up right now. Because for far too long, we have thought that creativity is reserved for those human mutations, designers, divas and artists of the world. But creativity can and should be a part of every person’s life.

In fact, if you look at our lives, a giant paradigm shift takes place that is pretty scary. All of us are born creative geniuses, yet somewhere along life’s path, this paradigm shift takes place. We move from the artistic to the analytical. We move from using laughter to using logic. We move from using our imaginations to using memorizations. Most of us end up doing life in the rut, same old - same old ritual, and same old routine.

We say, “That’s just the way it is. I just live my life in a prison cell of predictability. I’ll just splash around in the shallows of sameness with my little floaties on.” God says, “Hey, I want you to ride on the crest of creativity. I want you to be cutting edge. I want you to go for it in your marriage, in your career, with your family, and with your friends. I want you to mimic my character, which is creativity.”

We are in a series called CHARACTER TOUR. **Character is an outward reflection of an inward connection.** We’ve been looking at some awesome character qualities that we can develop and we’ve been doing that by looking at some characters from the Bible that we can emulate. We’ve talked about endurance, discipline and courage. But listen, all those character qualities flourish with creativity, and creativity flourishes in the presence of those other character qualities. There’s a synergy among the qualities we’ve been talking about, there’s a synchronicity. But what I’d challenge you and me today with is this: We have to have creativity to apply all of these things we’ve talked about so far. In other words, the character quality of creativity can help us implement all the others.

Now, we don’t have to look very far to run into creativity in the Bible. Just look at the first book of the Bible, the first chapter of the Bible, the fifth word. Check it out in Genesis 1:1, **“In the beginning, God created...” (Genesis 1:1, NIV).** God kick-started the creative process and he has been creating ever since. God is all about creativity. It is stamped onto his identity. Look at the variety and diversity in the universe. Astrophysicists are saying that the universe is infinitely large, and molecular scientists are telling us that it is also infinitely small. Look at the variety and diversity of life. We have still not named a majority of the species of life on earth. Look at the variety and diversity among us as human beings. Creativity is stamped in God’s identity, and it’s stamped in your life and in mine.

Look at Genesis 1:26. God is speaking, **“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26, NRSV).** Wait a minute, let us? Is there a misprint? God is speaking, “Let us?” That’s weird. And “in our image.” That seems strange. Our? Us? The trinity ... remember? God in three persons: Three in one; one in three; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Isn’t that something? We have the team thing going on. We have the creative trinity creating. God the Father invented creativity. He thought it up. He kick started it. The Father invented creativity.

And notice this: The Son modeled, and models still, creativity. Jesus modeled creativity. He preached from beaches and boat. He drew in the sand. He picked up a seed. He pointed to a building. He picked up a coin. He said, "Look at this child." He pointed to the sower. In one of his great teachings, he turned H₂O into Merlot. For you Baptists, that's water into wine! Jesus was always creating. He is the master teacher.

If you read the book of Matthew, for example, Matthew 13:34, it says, "**He did not say anything to them without using a parable**" (Matthew 13:34, NIV). A parable is a story, an example, an illustration, or a word picture that is contemporary to its culture. Here at Saint Paul's we strive to do the same thing. We are taking Christ's model and we have brought it into 2007. We are teaching the same message but we are changing the method. Week in and week out we communicate this unchanging message using changing methods.

So, the Father invented creativity. The Son modeled it. But also, the Holy Spirit empowers it. Remember that in this series we have been talking about character. Character happens from the inside. It's an outward reflection of an inward connection. Once I meet Christ personally, the king of creativity is in my life. He places the Holy Spirit in my life. When I defer to him, then I will reach my creative potential. Some people have a distorted view of the Christian faith, that it's all about boundaries, and limitations and what you can't do. That's so narrow-minded. The Christian faith is about being in relationship with the Creator of the universe, the living God, who desires to help us be creative! 2 Corinthians 3:17, "**Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom**" (2 Corinthians 3:17, NIV). Not, bondage, not limitations, not incarceration! Freedom! Not a prison cell of predictability! No. It says, "There is freedom." And part of that freedom is to be creative. It's stamped within you and me. But if you're like me, you struggle with this.

Have you ever asked yourself this question about creativity, "How can I be more creative?" Maybe right now, you are saying, "I wonder how I can be more creative." If you are asking that question, and I have asked it before, it's the wrong question to ask. When it comes to creativity, you have got to ask yourself the right question. The right question is this. "God, what is keeping me from creativity? What's keeping me from riding on the crest of it?"

That's the question. Basically, a lack of understanding keeps most of us in this prison cell of predictability. Most of us don't understand the fact that creativity has been stamped onto our spirit and soul by God himself. Secondly, most of us don't understand that we will never reach our creative potential until we sync up with Jesus Christ. It won't happen until we invite the king of creativity into our lives. Only then we will reach our creative potentials. We have a lack of understanding—but it goes deeper.

Maybe you've wondered this, "Why is it so difficult to think in a creative way? Why is it so difficult to have creative relationships, creative marriages, creative families, and creative careers? Why? Why is it so difficult to have a creative church? What's up with that?" Ed Young says that it's because creativity is a cosmic conflict. It's a war. It's a battle. That as we look at the Bible we see that every time God creates, what does Satan do? Satan contradicts the creation. He counterfeits it. So, God creates and Satan counterfeits.

For example, God wants you to have a creative marriage. He wants your marriage to reflect Christ's relationship to the church because, the Bible says, "**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...**" (Ephesians 5:25, NIV). Husbands, we are to love our wives in a self-sacrificial way. The Evil One does not want that to happen because it takes creativity to do that. He is going to bust it so we have a routine marriage—a same-old, same-old marriage, and a boring marriage. Satan does not want your family to soar so he comes after the family. The family is the building block of a healthy culture.

The same is true in your career and the same is true in the church. Every time God creates, Satan contradicts. Every time God creates, Satan has a counterfeit. It's everywhere. Creativity is a battle. It's a spiritual battle.

I want you to notice something else. When you think about creativity, it soars as individuals show it, right? Yes. But it really hits on all cylinders when it's done in a team—when it's a team thing. You will not believe what will happen to your life when you understand team creativity. In Genesis 1:26, the team, the trinity—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—was creating. Then you have got Moses

trying to do it all by himself. Jethro, not Bodine, but Moses' father-in-law, saying, "Moses, you're killing yourself, man. You have got to delegate. Build a team." There were Jesus' disciples. There are teams of people throughout the Bible being creative. Team creativity is where it is happening.

I know this from personal experience. For about half my ministry I tried to get ready for messages alone. I'd sit in my study and grind out messages. Bringing together things I read, and heard from other pastors. Studying the Bible, all by myself. After a few years of that, I was drained. Trying to create messages that were engaging, relevant, Biblical. Then I began to see how some of my spiritual heroes were doing it. They had teams of people who got together and brainstormed, and explored, and got creative together. I've discovered that thinking out loud with a group of people is the most creative setting there is. The ideas that are generated, the problems that are solved, the possibilities that are discovered. It's truly awesome, the creative power of teams. Jesus said that whenever two or more gather in his name he is there with them. That wasn't meant just to be about a time of prayer and worship. It's about his presence with us guiding us in creativity.

I believe that the church should be the most creative entity in the universe because we are worshipping, we are serving our creative creator. Sadly, this is not the case. Way too many churches are predictable. They are rut-like and they are boring. That's why so many churches are dying. If church is boring, don't ever blame God. God is exciting; God is creative. Don't blame God, blame the leaders who are communicating the stuff. When you go to church, you should be stimulated. When you go to church, you should be in contact with creativity.

But we have to admit that creativity is a demanding responsibility. God has not called us to an easy task. He has called us to a demanding responsibility. The good news, though, is that we have Christ, the King of Creativity, in our lives. Once we defer to him and allow him to work from the inside out, then we can be creative, first individually, and then collectively.

Let's bring it down to earth. Let's bring it down to where we can connect with it. I want to talk to you about some areas where we need some creativity right now. First of all, how about in a creative marriage? As I said earlier, your marriage and my marriage should reflect Christ's relationship to the church. The Evil One does not want that. You and your spouse are a team. Have you ever sat down as a team and shared a creative wish list with one another? A wish list of recreation, a wish list of romance, a wish list of things to learn, of adventures to take. Don't just wait for special occasions to do something special and creative, get on it! That's a little creativity homework.

How about with your family? Have you ever sat down with your family and said, "How can we create as a family? We have a team here. How can we be innovative?" The problem in our families is that we just park our kids in front of the television set and the kids haven't been outside in two or three years. They have just been playing video games and channel surfing. We need to change that. We need to have creative families. This takes energy.

Before our oldest daughter Zoe started school, she and I would go on our Friday adventures. And I tried to be creative about that. There were things we always did, go to Panera and go to Richardson's Candy House, but then I would try to do something different with her every week. Sometimes we would go for a hike along Shoal Creek. We'd load up a backpack with some water and snacks, and our walkie-talkies and we'd pretend. It always took me a little while to relax and just play and pretend, but once I got started, it came natural to me. Sometimes we'd pretend that we were a family of wolves and that the three little pigs were coming after us. I don't know how we came up with that one. Sometimes we'd go to one of the antique malls and just go through the stuff. That's like a hands-on museum where you can pick the stuff up and look at it—so cool and fun. Sometimes we would go to Great Expectations book store and play with their puppets. We went to a ceramics store and painted ceramic pieces. We'd go to the dollar store and buy some cheap junk toys. We'd go to the bead shop and make little things. Sometimes we'd stay home and build a contraption. We'd get cardboard tubes and tape and cans, and cups and balls and build this gigantic thing in the living room and roll rubber balls through it. We'd go hike through the woods behind our house and play and pretend, and imagine. Did that take energy on my part, you bet! Not Zoe's though, being creative comes so natural to kids,

using their imaginations is second nature to them. But being creative like that, in an ordinary sense, makes very strong bonds in a family. Tapping into our God-given creative potential makes a huge difference.

How about in your career? “Well, Aaron, all I’m doing is teaching 20 or 30 students. All I am doing is filing. All I’m doing is answering the phone.” What about creativity? Have you ever stepped back and said, “God, how can I be creative in this? God, unleash the creativity. Show me angles. Show me avenues. Show me paths I should take to make this exciting.” God has you where you are for a reason.

I deeply respect **George Washington Carver**. If you’ve not been out to his birthplace near Diamond, it’s worth the trip. It would be a great creative family journey. But Carver was an amazingly creative scientist. We’ve all heard about how he discovered over a hundred uses for the peanut include cosmetics, dyes, paints, nitroglycerine, gasoline, etc. But he was a pioneer in sustainable agriculture, agricultural education extension, education and the mentoring of children. He was a painter, a poet, a writer. And the most amazing thing is that he gave all the credit to God. He said that when he went in to his laboratory that God was right there with him. That it was as he prayed that God led him to discover and create. It was through his connection to Jesus Christ that he tapped into his academic, artistic, and humanitarian potential. That connection to God in our work places, and careers, whatever they may be, can help us to be creative even in the most mundane situations.

Once we reflect creativity, we are reflecting the character and nature of God, and guess what? People are attracted to creativity. Creativity in business, in churches, in families brings health and growth. What’s keeping you from it? You are a creative genius. You are a piece of art. What’s keeping you from it?

I’m going to challenge you to do something. I’m going to get right in your grill. Here’s the challenge. Make a high risk, high yield investment. Hit your knees and say, “God, unleash the creativity in my life.” Maybe you need creativity in your marriage. Maybe you need it in your family, your career, your recreational life, or in a friendship.

Here’s another challenge. Carve out some creativity time. Are you building time in your life just to think in a creative way? Find out that thing that inspires creative thoughts. Maybe it’s sitting in a coffee shop. Maybe it’s listening to music. Maybe it’s on the golf course. I don’t know where it is. I don’t know what you need to do, but have that thing operative.

Also, build a creative team around you. “Aaron, I don’t know any creative people. I don’t know any people who are creative.” Yes, you do. They are sitting around you. They are in your family. They are next to you in your cubicle at the office. They are next to you in your classroom. Build a creative team. Spend time with your kids. Kids are naturally creative! And get connected in a Home Group. We have small groups that meet at least once a month in homes around the area. Those can be your creative teams. Creativity is all about change, because when you have change, you are always going to have growth.

Think of it this way. I try to exercise several times a week, I run, lift weight, get on the stationary bike; last week I played racquetball and going to start doing that regularly. The thing about working out, lifting weights in particular, is that if you stay with the same workout very long, you stop making gains. Your muscles will plateau. But there’s something called the confusion principle. You need to change your workout about once a month because when you change it, it confuses your muscles which makes them grow. Your biceps go, “Wow, dude, what are you doing?” Your traps go, “This is weird.” Your pecs go, “Wow!” With change, you have growth. Why not apply the confusion principle to your marriage. Just confuse your wife. Why not apply the confusion principle in your home. Just confuse your family. Confuse people at work. Then, there will be growth.

Do a search on the Internet. You will not find creativity on very many character quality lists. But you search this book [the Bible]; there is creativity from the beginning to the end. It’s not optional, it’s foundational. Creativity, God invented it. Jesus modeled it. The Holy Spirit empowers it, and people desperately need it. People like you and me. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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