



NATHAN L. NICHOLSON

IN THE
BEGINNING
we
CREATE

REFLECTIONS
ON COLLABORATION,
CREATIVITY,
AND REST



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CONTENTS

Introduction | 1

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Created for Creativity 6 | 12. Rest 72 |
| 2. Collaboration 12 | 13. Rhythm 77 |
| 3. Workmanship 18 | 14. Disruption 85 |
| 4. Custom-Made 24 | 15. Creating Through Pain 92 |
| 5. Originality 30 | 16. Reflection 99 |
| 6. Taste 35 | 17. Comparison 103 |
| 7. Balance 40 | 18. Resetting 110 |
| 8. Growth 46 | 19. Inspiration and
Imagination 115 |
| 9. Confidence 55 | 20. Divine Instruction 121 |
| 10. Intention 63 | 21. Responsibility 126 |
| 11. Focus 68 | |

Conclusion: Your Why | 134

Acknowledgments | 138

Creations | 139

Notes | 140





INTRODUCTION

I know I have an artistic passion, but what do I do with it?

I know I have creative ability, but how do I harness it?

How do I make my God-given creative gifts effective?

If you're asking yourself these questions, this book is for you. Perhaps you're a painter, photographer, graphic designer, sculptor, or other kind of visual artist. Maybe you're a musician, producer, or music director. You might be a writer, speaker, clothing designer, florist, or actor. Maybe you get paid for your creations, or maybe art is something you do for fun or a sense of fulfillment. Whatever you do, creativity is part of who you are.

This book is for:

- Creative people who don't think that they are "creators."
- People who are just starting in their creative journey and need some guidance.
- People who have been on this journey of creative discovery for a while and need some refreshment.

Whoever you are, if you have the creative light burning within you, I'd like to fan your flame and keep it healthy. We could all learn from the steps God used to create us.

God is the ultimate Creator, and his creative abilities are unmatched. This book explores God's creative process and how we can emulate it in what he has gifted us to do. The book of Genesis will form the biblical foundation of our exploration. We'll take brief excursions into



other books of the Bible, but most chapters will return to Genesis. I've found a lot of direction and inspiration for my artistic journey in this book of the Bible, especially the story of God creating the universe, and I want to share what I've learned with you.

In addition to the book of Genesis, three big themes have helped me grow into the artist I am today: collaboration with God and with other creative people, the idea that human creativity is a reflection of God's work in creation, and the importance of rest in the life of a creative person. Each of these themes has its own chapter, but all three are so central to the way I think about art that they feature in other chapters as well.

You may be wondering who I am and what led me to write this book. I'm an artist, filmmaker, photographer, designer, and Christian minister. I'm a creator. I create to glorify God. I love creating because it's fun and brings me a great sense of joy and fulfillment. It's a huge part of my purpose. Through my creations, I aim to bring people together and inspire them to live. In many of my works, I make the skin tones a deep, sublime black to represent a sense of reverence. In other pieces, I make the skin a uniform grayscale—a nod to the uniqueness of Black people, which is sometimes lost in assumed stereotypes. Despite these less-than-vibrant skin tones, the beauty of the composition and individuality of their skin shines through.

This book features original pieces I have created. You can think of them as checkpoints on your creative journey through this text. I'd like to collaborate with you within these pages. Allow this book to be a spark for your creativity. Some artworks in this book are composite pieces in which I bring elements together to make something beautiful. Others are Paper Portraits, inspired by photos I took during a photo shoot or other event. While not every chapter has a



corresponding piece of art, there are series of artworks placed throughout the chapters.

There are twenty-one chapters in this book. I invite you to take it all in on a consistent schedule. That may mean reading one chapter a day over twenty-one days, or one chapter every other day, or one per week—whatever is comfortable for you. You may also want to read it with a partner or a group and be inspired in collaboration. Each chapter contains a prompt to spur you to creative action. If you act on the prompt, reflect on the artwork interspersed among the chapters, and keep an open mind and heart, you will be on your way to a transformative experience of creativity.

Are you ready to create? Let's begin!



start from nothing



DIGITAL ABSTRACTS

This work is a combination of digital paint and ink strokes, along with preexisting shapes, primarily made on my iPad in Procreate. These pieces are an interpretation of what I felt in the moment. Some are inspired by places I traveled to between 2021 and 2023, and others are inspired by songs and sermons I have listened to.



CREATED FOR CREATIVITY



BEFORE THE REIGN of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Phil Donahue was king of daytime TV ratings. I saw a clip of Bob Ross on *The Phil Donahue Show* from 1994. Donahue yelled in his own annoying and provocative way to Ross, “Say out loud your work will never hang in a museum, Bob!” Ross’s response was, “I’m trying to teach people a form of art that anybody can do. This art is for anyone who’s ever wanted to put a dream on canvas. It’s not traditional art, it’s not fine art, and I don’t try to tell anybody it is.” Ross wanted to open up the realm of creativity in a way that was accessible to millions. For eleven years, his program *The Joy of Painting* did just that. He provided people with the opportunity to complete a painting by the end of the show. He creatively found a way to bring a one-on-one teaching session to millions of students at home.¹

Why was Ross’s method so appealing to so many people? Why were millions of people—career artists and hobbyists alike—so enamored with the idea of creating art?

It’s tough to make definitive statements about all of humanity, but we can find clues about our creative impulse in the Bible’s account of creation. We are creative because we were made in the image of our Creator.

GOD IS CREATIVE

“In the beginning God created” (Genesis 1:1). The Hebrew word translated as *created* is a verb that refers to creating something out of nothing. It is only used to describe God’s kind of creation, which brings something out of nothing, or *ex nihilo*. This is an exclusive function of God’s omnipotence. God stepped out on nothing, spoke to nothing, and consulted with no one but himself—and from that nothing he created everything. He spoke from eternity, and time began. In the Bible God is referenced as the ultimate Creator (Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 40:28). The first thing we learn about God is that he is and was in the beginning, and the second thing we learn about God is that he creates. I find it fascinating that one of the very first attributes of God we encounter is his creativity. Our God creates. And as his intelligent design, made in his image, we also create. Creativity is godly. Just as we inherit certain traits from our natural parents, we inherit our creative impulse from God.

God’s creative process provides a template for everything that we create. He determined the starting point. He set aside time. We do not need to look too far into Genesis before we find God’s template for creating effectively.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. (Genesis 1:1-5)



The earth needed order, so God established seasons, created a hierarchy, and implemented systems. The universe wasn't a blank canvas; rather, it was something raw that God placed into perfect order. This scriptural template shows how God focused on the big details first and then on the more intricate details throughout the process. He made the heavens and the earth first. We can think of these as the frames of his artistic masterpiece. If we continue reading, we see that he then filled the frames with masterful creativity and detail, color, and texture. Light. Plants. Sun. Moon. Stars. Birds. Land animals. And God's most creative and detailed work—humanity.

Consider the creation of humankind for a moment. God drew up the plans for his creation of Adam when he said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). Being made in God's image entails so much more than just the physical aspect. We are made in his image and likeness as spiritual and moral beings. Thinking and feeling beings. Creative beings. We as humans are an original



design by God, but in our originality, we also see that God used himself as the template in our creation.

WE GET OUR CREATIVITY FROM GOD

Creativity is an expression of intimate thought, marrying our gifts and passions with our past experiences and current ideas. Creativity helps to carry thoughts from ideas to reality and dreams to fruition. It is an artistic expression that originates with a simple concept and ends with a beautiful creation. It is the manifestation of God's gift of inspiration, freedom of thought, and the courage to try new things. Creativity also adds flavor to life; it expresses originality, challenging the conventional and unleashing our imagination. It is the splash of color on a blank canvas, the spark that breathes new life into the plain and uninspiring. It is not simply artistry, but it also provides solutions to problems with flair and poised balance. Creativity is where innovation and imagination meet to give birth to something new. Our creativity allows us to transform ideas into real works of art. Innovation is a freeing act of courage that enables you to set trends. You are not simply a thermometer. You are a thermostat, setting trends and seeking to gain new ground in what has never been done or even known before. People may not understand at first, but don't let that distract you. Though it's a new idea, somehow it makes perfect sense, leaving other people to wonder, *Why didn't I think of that?*

We inherited this trait from our heavenly Father. When we express our creativity, we are, in effect, collaborating with God to bring more beauty into the world. What would life be without creativity?

No matter the creative discipline we use, we can offer our creativity back to God. We can become a worship leader without a mic or a worshiper equipped with creative acumen whose instrument is



a laptop, paintbrush, camera, clay, pen, pencil, or Conté crayon. No matter the avenue, we can render our services to the glory of God, making our mark one project at a time.

God is perfect, and he created everything with perfection. Although we were also created to create, we are imperfect, and our creations will not always turn out perfectly. That's okay. There's peace in knowing that when we create, we can imitate God. We simply have to start with the framework and home in on the details later.

By offering our creativity to God, we give back to him what he has given us in a spirit of worship. What do you create? How do you give it back to him?

RESPONSE

This is your opportunity and excuse to create something new. Do you have an idea for a creative project? Before the day is done, take one practical step toward turning that idea into a reality.



**TIMES
WAITING
ON YOU
TO START**



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