

this is for the creator in you

a 7-day devotional for
understanding your
creative calling and
creating at your best

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intro

duction

We all have God's creative gene.

I've always known that I was a creative or creator. Numerous ideas mill around in my head at once, working to build some form of transportation to get out into the world. Unfortunately, I grew up only being allowed a very controlled kind of creativity. I was essentially taught that the creative part of me was not valuable to God, my family, or my future. This ideology stifled me for a long time and made it hard to find myself and my place in the world as a creator.

In my time suppressing, doubting, timidly uncovering, and then more boldly stepping into my creativity, I recognized that it was much bigger than I'd imagined. Sure, I had ideas - notebooks full of them. Yes, I'd started projects - hundreds of them. However, I never fully comprehended the weight and depth, the height and breadth of the creative mantle. I never fully understood the kind of dedication this commission actually demanded.

Now, I believe every human being is a creative in some way. We are made in God's image so we all have God's creative gene. The difference is that some of us allow Fear to claim our creative ability and we settle into lives that are comfortable instead of lives that make miracles. This is not meant to shame but to draw attention to the epidemic of creative dissonance (the clash between our actual creative abilities and our episodic belief in them) that many of us feel but never fully examine to clarity and correction.

What could we be capable of if we decided to believe in our God-given gifts for more than a few minutes, days, or weeks at a time? How might our lives shift if we took a few steps everyday toward becoming more of the creator God intended us to be? What mountains might move if today, we decided to live the best of our imaginations?

We are called to innovate. It's in our DNA.

As you work through this devotional, please understand that this is not meant to be a magical formula for perfect creatorship. The creative's journey is an individual one and perfection is not a trait nor a goal. This devotional is, however, an invitation to see yourself the way the ultimate Creator sees you and to clear away the mental, spiritual, and emotional clutter.

Catch the vibe. Take the steps. This will free you to embark on your journey with fresh eyes, an open spirit, and revived motivation.



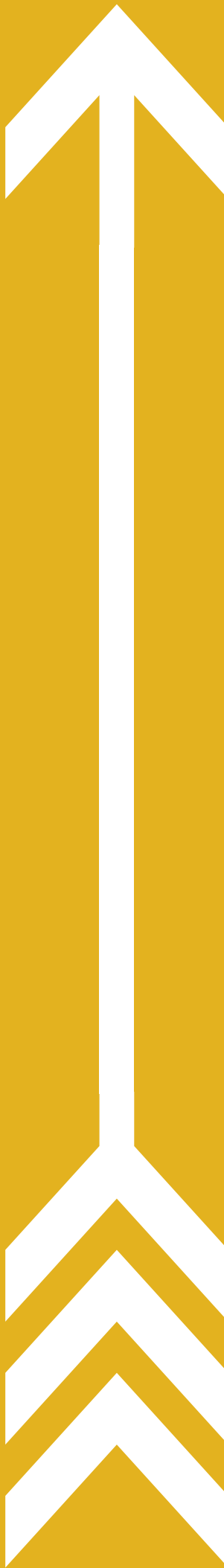
Why only 7 days?

I've completed tens of bible study and devotional plans but if you ask me to recall the bulk of the content, I couldn't tell you. It's not that these studies had no significant impact on me; they did for the moment. But I recognized that I'm better able to retain and put into practice less information that I meditate on for longer periods of time. More often than not, I reflect on a single chapter, verse of scripture or Biblical principle for a week (or weeks) at a time, wringing every bit of revelation and inspiration from it. I don't like to mechanically move through studies. For me, they need time to cook if they are going to add any value to my life.

I pray that this devotional is that kind of slow cooker nourishment for you. Soul food. Something you can savor. Something to which you can return and get a second and third helping when needed.

I pray that you can consistently glean from this devotional.

I pray it inspires you to take solid hold of the inspiration necessary for the adventure that is your faith walk and your creative evolution.



what does
it mean to
be a
creator?

“Am I a creator?”

”

You’ve always known things that others have not. You’ve always seen innovation where others dismissed any viability. Your dreams are distinct.

What’s in your hands is holy. You knew you were different since childhood. You’ve got notebooks and iPhone notes and voice recordings of ideas and thoughts and empires and worlds that await activation. Yet, you stand still, wondering. You’re not quite sure these seeds are worth planting.

You’re not quite sure that if they were planted, you have the know-how to nourish them into a harvest.

There is nothing coincidental about where you are now and what is in you. You have settled, in some ways, for a safe life with very little creative flow out of fear that you’re not actually a creator. You hedge your bets better than anyone because your 'just in case' is bigger than your conviction of your identity. Your Plans B, C, and D are probably even more detailed than your dreams of creating because you see others who seem to do it better than you ever could.

You ask yourself a million times in a million different ways,

“Am I creator and if I am, what does that even mean?”

The good news is that before we can create at our best, we have to have a clear understanding of what it means to be a creator. So, you’re on the right track.

The Digital Age has generally conditioned us to 'stay relevant' by overloading output at the expense of quality.

I get it. As a creator and social media enthusiast, I constantly fight that feeling of impending obscurity if I'm not incessantly saying, posting, or doing something.

If we aren't careful, we can allow that pop cultural push to make us dismiss the first step to creating at our personal best: Understand the reason for creatorship.

On that understanding hangs the effectiveness of any creative success or impact we could ever have. I have started and stopped hundreds of creative projects from manuscripts to movies, from paintings to poems because I could not find the confidence to complete them. That confidence was wrapped up in finding the reason those ideas came to me. And they kept coming - no matter how badly I initially mismanaged them.

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines a creator as "*a person who makes something new.*"

The preeminent reason for creatorship is to make something new. It's not to be relevant or to increase followers. It's not to grab the attention of executives or to get rich quick. Creators dig deep to produce that which either has never existed or that which improves upon something that does exist.

With this understanding as a solid baseline, let's jump into our week-long devotional!



day 1

connect
with the
Creator

So, why are we creators?



"I found out that if you wanna know the purpose of a thing you can't ask the thing to tell you. A car doesn't know why it's a car. Only the manufacturer knows what it was made to do. And I guess that's the way it is with us and God."
- Not Easily Broken

For years, the title 'Creator' was only taken seriously in reference to God, ad men, and television show producers. Now, it's permeated every mode of communication and social platform. Everyone is or wants to be a creator. While, technically, this isn't a bad thing, it has misshapen the idea and intent to the point that we lost touch with the realities of actual creatorship. To be a creator has become synonymous with overnight fame, perfection, and across-the-board likability.

This. Is. Not. Reality.

I believe we all know this intellectually. Emotionally and socially, though, it can be difficult to focus on the truths of creatorship when culture has inverted it so cogently.

Popular culture says, "Creatorship is about relevance at the expense of substance."
Truth says, "Creatorship is about substance and service as a result of connection with the Source."



We are given the gift of creativity to connect with God and to connect others with God. **Creativity is a gift of service.** In order to understand and to truly see ourselves as creators we have to look at the Source of creation. So dig this:

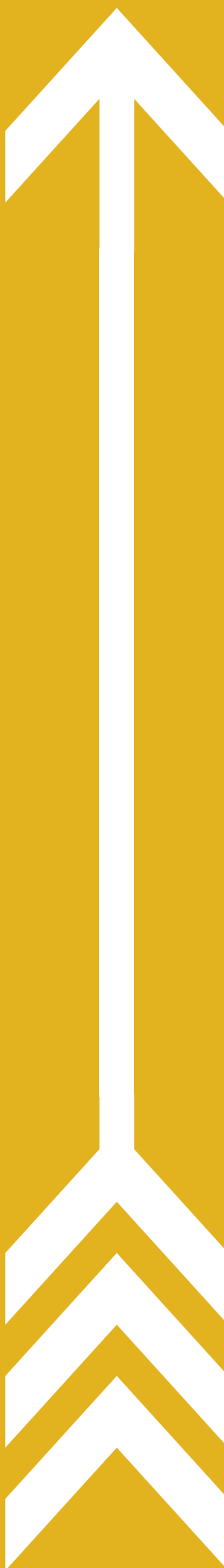
"Then God said, "Let Us (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) make man in Our image, according to Our likeness [not physical, but a spiritual personality and moral likeness]; and let them have complete authority..." So God created man in His own image, in the image and likeness of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them [granting them certain authority]..."

- Genesis 1:25-28 [AMP]

Just before this passage, God looked into an abyss of nothingness and assessed the situation. He then spoke what He was going to create and then and created an entire universe filled with light and dark, oceans, stars, fish, fowl, trees, rocks and US. Then, He validated His own handiwork by calling it "good."

God created us and everything we see, touch, feel, and hear out of total abstraction by staring at a blank canvas, speaking what He was going to create, creating it, and calling it good. It's important to restate because I don't know that we look at the Creation story with as discerning an eye as we should. God formatted an important creative process from the very beginning!

This reveals one of the first things we have access to as a result of being created in God's image - Him, His creative genes! ***We are created in God's image and authorized to innovate from the glut of sameness/nothingness we see everyday.***



To be a creator means to walk in lockstep with God foreseeing, speaking and innovating beauty and progression. ***To be a creator is to recognize and walk in the authority we have to look into oversaturated spaces and call forth purpose, form, name, and specific influence where it seems none exists.*** We were created with and given that authority. It means that we use our hands, eyes, hearts, and minds to summon the unthinkable; to imagine what, for most, is unimaginable.

Likes and views do not offer enough support for true creators to hand over our process and authority to them. The ability to create is not to garner validation. Validation is only truly effective when it comes from the One who commissioned us to create; from the adventure of going all the way in, in collaboration with God.

Our creative calling won't become clear to us until we build relationship with God. It's as simple as that.

PRAYER:

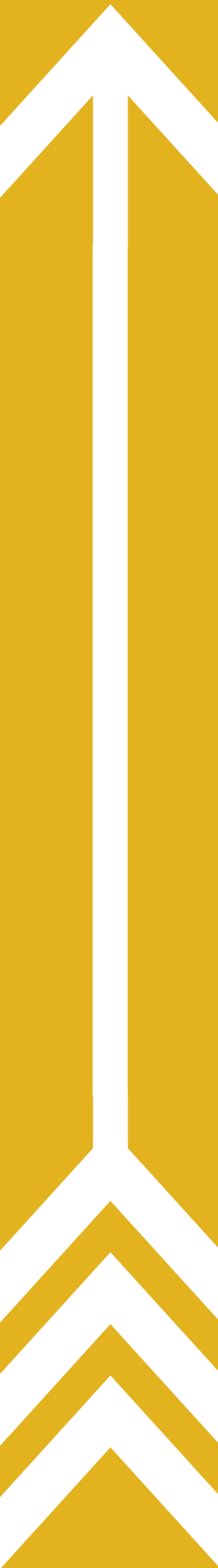
Dear God,

I admit, some days it's hard to wrap my mind around the fact that I'm made in Your image.

I don't fully know how to get all of the dreams and ideas out of my heart and head out into the world but I am hopeful that as I lean into You, You'll show me.

Give me patience with myself and a desire to be totally dependent on You to grow into the creator You predestined me to be. In the moments when I'd like to throw it in, remind me that I am authorized to innovate and help me to keep up my pace.

Amen.



day 2

trust the
Creator

Trust is essential to the creator's journey.

Creating at our best is, essentially, following through on our dreams despite not having all the answers.

Some days I deeply identify with the meme that says, "***Do you ever just wish God would come sit on your bed and tell you what to do?***"

How much easier would life be if God gave us all the answers in sequential order? But then, where is the growth and innovation in that? While there is no absolute formula, I do believe that there are key postures we can adopt to make sure we're moving toward creating at our best.

The first is to be a trusting creator.

In Genesis, when God instructed Noah to build an ark, there were a lot of things going on (or not going on) that would have caused many of us to question God and our ability, and possibly not even attempt to carry out the task. First of all, it had never rained before so the need for a boat was totally insane. Second, it took Noah years to complete the ark. Third, only his family seemed to believe in him.

I know me and that combination might have been enough to discourage me from completing the job (I'm a work in progress).

Having no frame-of-reference and very few people who believe in you can get you down sometimes. It can make you doubt what you know you heard God tell you to do. It can make you look for other, easier methods instead of the one, challenging route God assigned to you.

Trust is essential to the creator's journey. You are calling into existence things that have never existed before. What you see in your mind's eye can only be born when you trust that God gave you the vision and will provide what is needed to make it a reality.

Noah could not have found grace and favor to do what had never been done if he had no relationship with the One who commissioned him.

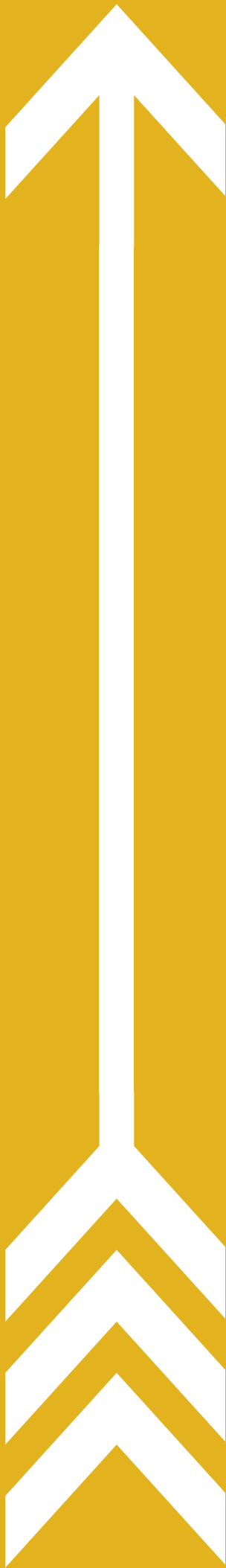
A few years ago Denzel Washington told a stage of young actors, "***True desire in the heart for anything good is God's proof to you sent beforehand to indicate that it is yours already.***"

Trusting that the ideas you scribble in notebooks or casually discuss with friends are God signaling to you that you are favored is paramount. Trusting that there is a grace on your life for something bigger than you is necessary. If it wasn't bigger than you, then you would never doubt yourself.

That initial doubt is good. It means it's a God thing and not a you thing. And ultimately all things created should lead back to God.

Noah trusted God by following His instructions.

God gave Noah a blueprint for a boat that hadn't been built before - down to the measurements of the rooms and the type of wood to use. I'm sure Noah might have thought he was going crazy at first.



Callings from God usually go beyond what we imagine we can achieve.

Whether we have all the details or not, whether we have the financial backing or just twenty dollars to our name, whether everyone believes in what we're trying to do or they write us off as ridiculous - that kind of unconditional trust gives us the fuel to keep going. It gives us the resolve to know that God will give us everything we need in order to complete the work.

PRAYER:

God,
There have been moments when I have ignored Your call for me to create. I ignored out of fear and lack of trust in the fact that if You commissioned it then I am more than capable of completing it.

Today, I stamp out the fire of distrust and indecision that have burned away many opportunities in my life. I ask Your forgiveness for ever letting it burn at all.

Today, I ask You to show me again. To tell me again. To instruct me again. To commission me again. Release me again to innovate. To build. To transform. Help me to see creativity where fear once blinded me and I will follow You.

Amen.



day 3

be

courageous

Courage limits Fear's influence.



I never watched a single 'Rocky' movie completely until 2016. I know, I'm late.

The other week, after watching 'Creed' for the third time, I began to research the start of it all. The backstory inspired me even more than the six-picture franchise.

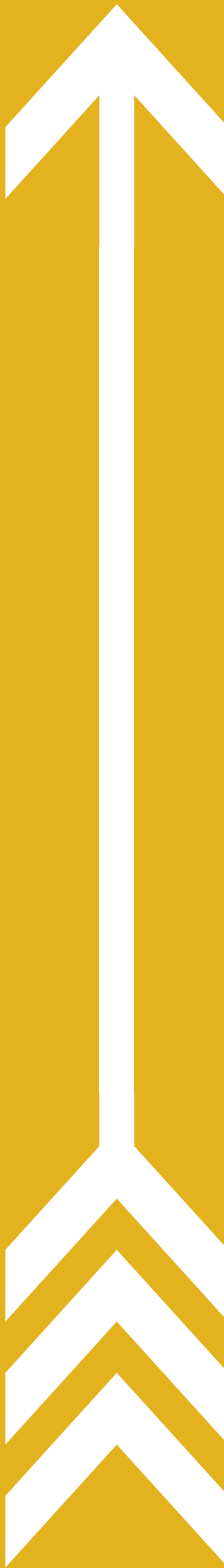
In 1975, Sylvester Stallone had \$160, a pregnant wife, a dog he was about to sell, and bills piling up. It was at this time that he wrote the screenplay for 'Rocky' in three and a half days.

He could either keep working a dead-end job or muster the courage to pursue his dream. He knew the value of his idea and he decided to go for broke, betting it all on a 90-page screenplay.

He spent three days writing the script on a notepad. His wife then took it and typed it up. Stallone had little left to lose and worlds to gain.

When he finally got the attention of Hollywood producers, they offered him \$350,000 to sell them his script. They wanted to cast big-time Hollywood actors at the time like Robert Redford or James Caan. Stallone knew he was meant to play the leading role and refused to sell. The producers finally decided to take a chance on a no-name actor with a good script.

Sometimes courage and desperation dance with one another. Desperation to be more, see more, feel more than what is happening at present.



On a shoestring budget of one million dollars and in 28 days' time, Rocky was filmed and went on to win Golden Globes and Oscars and yield hundreds of millions of dollars as the franchise progressed.

Sylvester Stallone credited his courage and desperation and the right mix of people to produce the franchise that has become a classic source of inspiration for millions.

For a lot of us, courage happens when our back is against the wall and we have no other options.

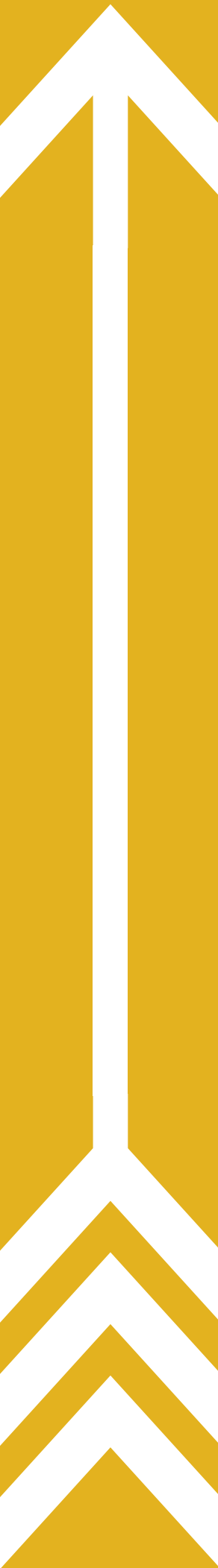
It's human nature to want to settle into a safe life with minimum risks and maximum security. And yet, that life yields nothing world-changing. It impacts very little and it robs us of the mind-blowing influence God planned for those who choose bravery.

I used to believe courage was absence of fear before I ever truly had to be courageous in my life. Now, I know courage limits Fear's influence and redirects what's left of its influence toward the desired outcome.

Courage is consistently seen throughout the Bible as a mandate for achieving what God has called us to. It's not an option. It's a call to trust God and to move wisely and open-heartedly toward the goal.

Psalm 107:23, 24 says, ***"Those who go down to the sea in great ships, who do business on great waters, they have seen the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep."***

Joshua 1:9 says, ***"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and very courageous. Do not be terrified or dismayed (intimidated), for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."***



There comes a point (or many points) in our lives when we have to decide how courageous we are going to be. The incredible, ridiculous, miraculous things that happen thereafter are a direct result of how far we decide we're going to leap on faith, truth, and courage.

PRAYER:

Dear God,

You already know, I don't have all the answers and I can't lie, sometimes I want them. The call to be courageous pushes me further than I want to go and keeps me longer than I want to stay sometimes. But in it all, I know that You are stretching me. I know that You are building my resolve. I know that You are building my resistance to defeat.

I want to beat Fear at its own game.

Whenever there is a choice between quitting or running into battle alongside You - help me to do battle every time.

I am made for this. I am in Your hands. I choose courage over cowardice to create what only You can inspire.

Amen.



day 4

be honest

Creating is not for our validation.



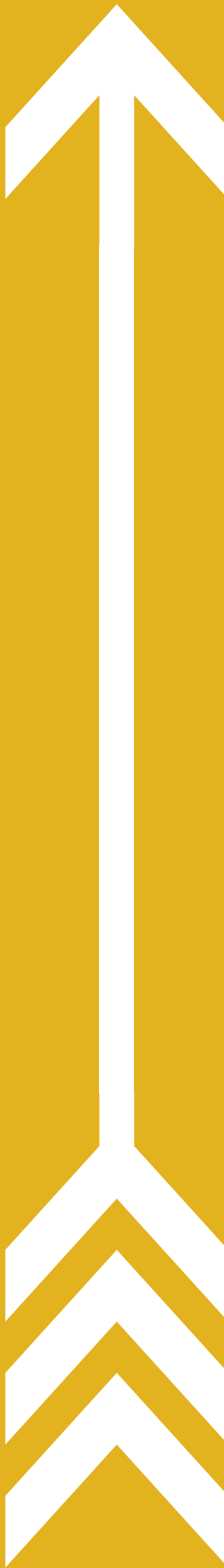
Renowned singer/songwriter Mary J. Blige has used some of her hardest lessons in love and life as the meat of her 20+ year music career. Her success is not accidental. Why does her music do so well? She's honest and that is refreshing in a world where filter is king. Her overcomer's story is always relatable.

Bishop T.D. Jakes says often, "***Nothing will be wasted.***"

But I know we don't want to hear things like that. We cherry pick the best of our lives because we are afraid of using the scary, hurtful, ugly parts. Truth is, without those less-than-perfect chapters, the book of our lives would suck.

I fight the truth of my story sometimes. It's not so much about lying as it is about omission. I don't want to tell the whole truth because of how weak it might make me look. I don't want to tell the whole truth because some mistakes I shouldn't be making at this point in my life. There are a plethora of reasons we reject certain parts of our stories and embrace others. Most of those reasons are directly connected to managing others' perceptions of us and that is directly connected to our ego which does more harm than good where purpose is concerned.

The ugly stuff, the things that hurt us so badly we didn't think recovery was a possibility, the hard knocks, those are the parts that make us effective creators. When we decide to be our whole selves we give others permission to do the same.



Remember, creating is not for our validation. It is service to God and others. We serve others in the greatest way when we choose to be honest.

Being a creator is both deeply personal and completely selfless. Use everything. There are no scraps. There is no waste. Your life is everything it is because you are a messenger.

A messenger for perseverance, hope, joy, style, gratitude, comfort, help, and authenticity.

Romans 8:28 says, ***"And we know [with great confidence] that God [who is deeply concerned about us] causes all things to work together [as a plan] for good for those who love god, to those who are called according to His plan and purpose."***

PRAYER:

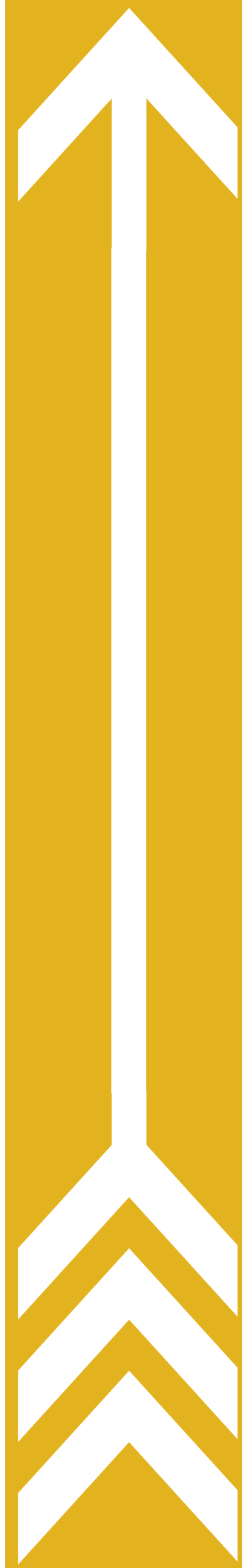
Father,

I don't always like the vulnerability it takes to be honest about the messy parts of my life.

So, I need Your help in bedding my ego and using every part of my story because I know that my life is not just about me. I know that there people waiting to hear what I've come through and what lessons I learned. I know that there are places my story can reach that I may never go physically.

So, I surrender my self-doubt and my desire to seem perfect and I ask for the grace, first, to accept all of what makes me me and all of what makes my story unique - good, bad, and ugly. Second, I ask for the grace to joyfully use it all for Your glory and others' freedom.

Amen.



day 5

live your life

True creators embrace being students of life.

"The only reason 'The Miseducation' was the album it was, was because of a myriad of experiences that took place before the production part, before the creation. So what I realized was, "You know what? I can't create and not live....

Life has peaks and valleys. Some people explain that as 'good times, bad times' but I actually think it's 'learning and mastership' or 'study and mastership. In hip-hop, everyone wants to stay on the top of one mountain when God's intention is that we study and master a bunch of different things."

- Lauryn Hill

It is tempting to stay in one place that strokes our ego once we recognize our gifts. But knowing and operating in our creative ability is only a piece of the creator's puzzle. We have to live a life from which we can pull experience. ***There is no effective creativity without experience.***

What Lauryn Hill's early musical success and legacy have taught us is that great creative works take time and a life well-lived in order to make significant and long-lasting impact.

Psalm 16:11 says, ***"You make known to me the path of life, in Your presence there is fullness of joy, at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."***

God equips us with what we need to live fully. It's up to us to take His provision and get to livin'. It's also up to us to stay thoughtful and observant of the lessons along the way.

Creativity doesn't magically appear. It materializes as a result of our lived experiences and lessons learned. We must constantly fight the feeling to stay in safe lifestyles that do not challenge us to evolve. We must interact with new people, read new books, travel to different places. This gives us the ability to think and imagine in new ways.

Our valley moments are just as crucial as our mountaintop moments.

True creators embrace being students of life.

PRAYER:

Dear God,

I thank You for the life I have. I am open to living it more fully as You give me the grace. Show me how to happily and wisely learn new things and share my life with others. I give up the desire to stay on top.

I want to be wherever I can grow - mountain or valley. I am ready to travel beyond what has always been. I am ready to walk with You into experiences beyond my wildest dreams.

Amen.



day 6

be

intentional

To be intentional we have to be reflective.

I've followed Ava DuVernay's work since 'I Will Follow', one of her first independent films.

What I admire about her trajectory is that she chooses projects that center women both in front of and behind the camera and she focuses on telling stories of marginalized communities - especially women of color and people of color.

Her focus on telling real stories and bringing diversity and inclusion to Hollywood teaches a lesson that is worth its weight in gold.

DuVernay's work is a case study on intentionality in creativity.

There must be focus to what we do. Without any rhyme or reason to our creative pursuits, becoming sidetracked is inevitable. The thirteen open tabs on my Macbook Air are proof.

When we arrive at a place where we hear God clearly, we are clear not only on our gifts but on our focus/direction.

In order to be intentional, we have to be reflective. Looking over your life to see the common threads that have always made your heart leap make it easier to be intentional because you are putting together the puzzle pieces.

You can be the best photographer, graphic designer, actress, or writer but if there is no intention behind the use of your gifts - your gifts can become a curse.

Some questions you can ask yourself to build intentionality:

What ideas/causes keep coming to me in my time with God?

What do others consistently ask me to do?

What major lesson has my life taught me?

How can I best serve others?

What brings me joy?

In answering these questions we move toward living by clear intentional decisions and not on a default setting.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I have a lot of ideas. Sometimes it's difficult to focus on the details. Being overwhelmed leads to me doing a mediocre job or doing nothing at all. I want to be more reflective so my intention can become unequivocally clear to me. Show me how my life is to be used for Your glory.

Give me clear vision and unstoppable determination to move strategically. In the moments when I would abandon my purpose and intention for random pursuits, remind me of who I am and that focus brings results.

I will not give up because I know Your plan for my life is too incredible to quit on. Help me to press.

Amen.



day 7

get rest



Rest is not a weakness.



God rested after He created the entire world in six days. He rested and He's GOD.
Again, He gave us an impeccable blueprint for creating:

He stared at/studied the abyss.
He spoke what He would create from that abyss.
He created what He spoke.
He approved His work by calling it "good".
He rested.

God's blueprint and work ethic are second to none.
He pulled an entire world and all its details from the recesses of His infinite mind, validated His own work, and rested once His project was complete.

The #TeamNoSleep culture is not a wise creator's approach. Even if only from a scientific/medical perspective - the body needs rest to replenish itself.

Sometimes we need to walk away from a project - rest our minds and our eyes and come back to it when we are refreshed.

Feigning invincibility serves no one. It depletes us and makes it harder to create effectively. It steals from us and by stealing from us, it steals from those who need to receive what we have to offer.

Psalms 127:2 says, "In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat— for he grants sleep to those he loves."

Rest is not a weakness. It keeps us at our best.



PRAYER:

Dear God,

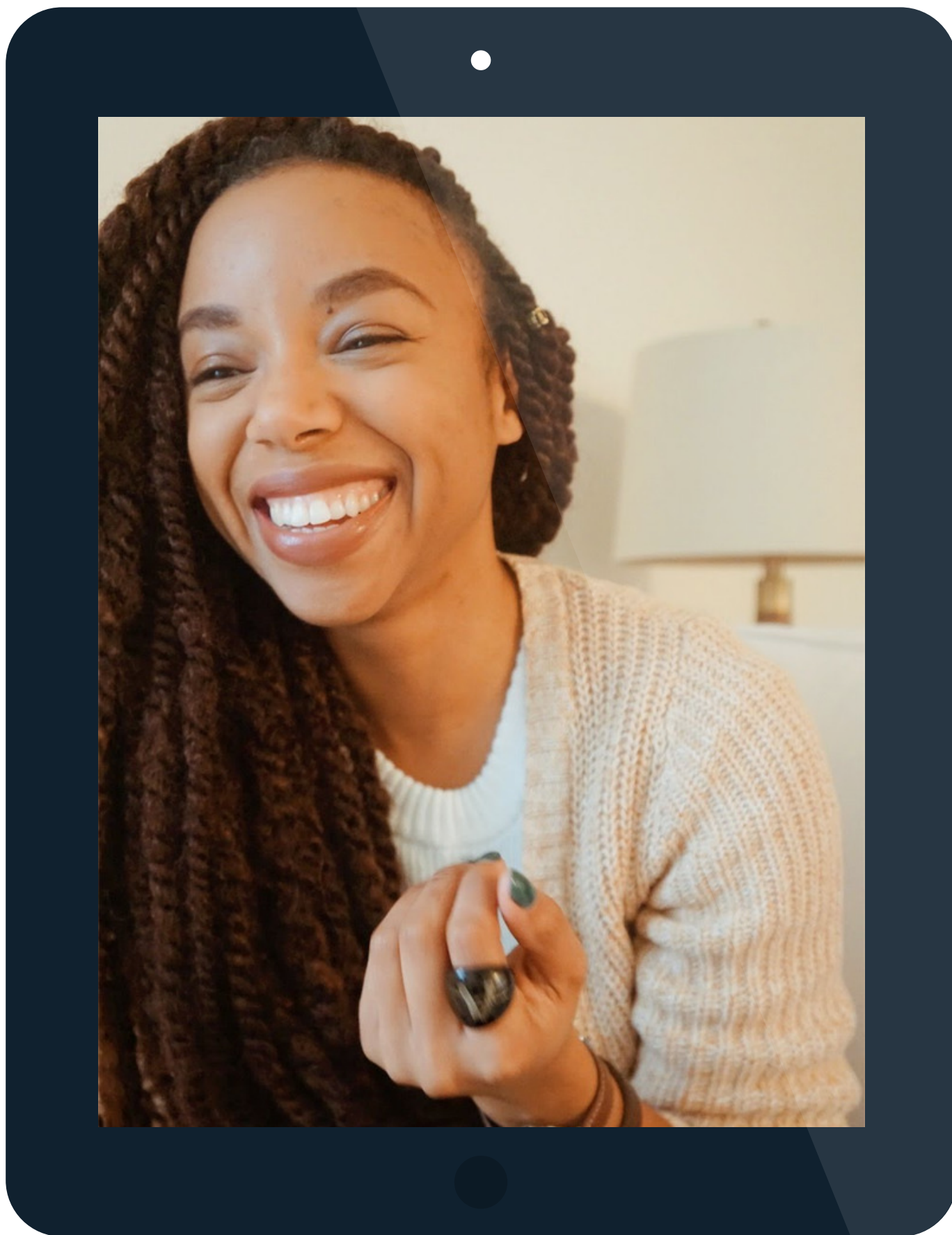
Your example is the most important one I will follow. I need Your help to resist the urge to push myself beyond my capacity when You are calling me to rest. It seems like the world moves so fast and I want to jump in and hustle like everyone else.

Help me to see - day by day - how important and restorative it is to rest in You.

Amen.



about the author



Ashley is a storyteller who looks through a lens of faith to serve those in need of encouragement. She digs for authentic narratives and shares them to encourage and free others to be honest. Her blog, Temple & Riot, sits at the crash site of faith, creativity, and culture and is a resource for workable tips and prayerful encouragement for the 21st century creative.

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