

Shimmers of Truth in the Art of Theatre

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### Abstract

Many Christians have noted Romans 1:20's statement that God is reflected in His creation. As a theater student, I have found this to be true even in how theatrical artists actually execute their craft. Thus, for my senior honors thesis I have decided to further study this connection between the Lord and theater, for which I expect to find more of what I have already found in parallels between the Christian walk and theater arts. For the completion of this thesis, research for theatrical content will include acting and design, and research for biblical content will include the Bible and prominent theologians such as John Piper and John MacArthur. This information will then be organized, analyzed, and elaborated on in regards to the connection between theatre and theology. The result will be a collection of devotionals specifically related to the theatrical artist's craft and work.

## **Shimmers of Truth in the Art of Theatre**

### **Introduction**

Life is complicated for the Christian theatre artist. Whenever we are at work, we hear how religion and morals restrict and hinder artistic expression. We then walk out of the theater and into the doors of the church, where our friends chat about theatre as either a pit-stop entertainment, a tool only useful for evangelism, or the greatest enemy of morality in society. People say the only place where theatre and God intersect is inside the walls of a church under the ministry titled “dramatic outreach.” They think that theatre as an art form is void of religious value, and that the only reason to work in the industry is to witness to and confront the lost sinners of the entertainment world.

Is this truly the case? In *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer (2009) accuses “the common habit of dividing our lives into two areas, the sacred and the secular” as “one of the greatest hindrances to internal peace” (p. 65). If theatre and art must stay separate from God, then it would have to follow that God would reject art. This is because God loves us far too much to accept anything that separates us from Him. However, God is the Master Artist and the first Storyteller. He is the original Creator of beauty. It must then follow that the craft of theatre is able to coexist with a life interwoven with the love and blessings of God.

Retta Blaney (2003) confirms this in her book *Working on the Inside*. After interviewing countless actors in theatre and film, she has come to the conclusion that “[a] great many actors think of their work as spiritual, especially when they are doing theatre” (p. xi). Her entire book is a reflection on what various stars including Liam Neeson and Kristin Chenoweth have to say about the connection between their craft and various

elements of their spiritual lives. They found that an intimate relationship with God often helped them refine their craft.

Ken Gire (1996) takes this connection between theatre and God a step further in his devotional *Windows of the Soul*. Not only does he see God as an important element in art, but he also recognizes how art can teach us about God. In his devotion titled “Windows of Movies,” he points to an instance in his life where the film *Camelot* taught him why Christ had to die in order to forgive the sins of the world. Just as King Arthur is confronted with the battle between fulfilling justice by condemning Guinevere or fulfilling his love by forgiving her, God was faced with the dilemma of forfeiting justice or love. In response, while Arthur chose to sacrifice love, God upheld both by fulfilling judgment on Jesus Christ in our place (p. 127).

It is in this spirit that I write this devotional. I have discovered that even beyond the stories it tells, the very structure of our craft mirrors truth about the Christian life. For example, asking questions brings diversity in our art. It also deepens our walk with Christ. In both Christianity and theatre, asking questions takes us beyond the surface.

This is written to those placed by God in the ravishing world of theatre who feel torn between their life’s work and a desire to live and work in a place that testifies to the truth of God. Friend, these places are one and the same. God did not lead you to a life in a desert lacking the water of His truth. Theater is a lush forest filled with shimmers of God’s truth sprinkled across the forest floor, glistening like dewdrops in the morning sun. It is my prayer that this work will enrich your life with the realization or the reminder that God is not separate from the work he has given you. He is speaking to you through it.

### **Shimmers of Truth in a Curious Mind**

Art is the outpouring of our souls' desires to speak truth outside the realm of cold, hard facts. Through art, we bring fresh images, sounds, and ideas alive by refining the elements of everyday life and fusing them together to create something new. It is the reshaping of reality. Chinua Achebe, a Nigerian novelist and poet, describes art as "man's constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him" (as cited in Ohaeto, 1997, p. 206). The novelist samples plot pieces and character traits from a vast banquet of the human experience and expertly combines them to tell a story. The set designer melds the details and themes of a script with inspiration from life to create an environment that "let[s] its reality shine through" (Jones, 2004, p.25). The painter absorbs ideas and images from reality and releases them onto a canvas. In each case, the artist refashions the pieces of reality to give life to a new creation.

If art is born by our reassembling of reality, then it is conceived by our questioning of reality through imagination. Constantine Stanislavski, often admired as "the most important single figure in the history of acting" (Benedetti, 1976, p.41), teaches that "art is a product of the imagination" and that "[t]he play, the parts in it, are the invention of the author's imagination." According to him, the actor's ability to "turn the play into a theatrical reality" grows in response to the nutrients of the imagination (Stanislavski, 1989, p. 59). We tap our imagination by asking questions about what we already know. Stanislavski applies this idea to acting with his technique called the "magic if," encouraging students to imagine what it would be like if they lived the same lives as the characters that they perform. This method is a valuable key that can open the actor's door to the world of the play (Barton, 2012, p. 117).

Michael Chekhov (1953) also inspires us to use imagination and imagery to enrich our senses within the world of the play by asking questions. In his book *To the Actor on the Technique of Acting*, he gives an example of playing Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. He instructs us to ask, “Show me, Malvolio: how would you enter the gates of the garden and with a smile move toward your ‘sweet lady?’ ” Our response to the image that Malvolio gives us is “his first answer to [our] question.” Chekhov explains that from this point on, our questions collaborate with the images. “You guide and build your character by asking it new questions, by ordering it to show you different variations of possible ways of acting” (p. 23-25).

In Christianity, there is a stigma surrounding the idea of asking questions about what we already “know” about God. When we doubt, we shame ourselves for our lack of faith. As a result, we try to believe that our doubts do not exist. If we stay in this place too long, we can slowly build up a wall between God and ourselves. Ignoring the truth can cause us to avoid God just as much as we avoid our doubt. For example, ignoring doubt about God’s love may cause us to avoid God. If we become comfortable with doubting His love, we may then become indifferent to knowing the truth. Once this happens, it will not take long for our doubt of His love to become disbelief. We should instead face our doubts by bringing them to God, and we do this by searching the Scriptures for answers. When treated correctly, our doubts can actually become blessings, because pursuing God’s truth leads us into a closer relationship with Him.

I recently experienced both approaches to doubt in my life. My best friend went through a difficult time where several devastating medical conditions all appeared at once. As her roommate and closest friend, I became very involved with her health.

However, during this time I began to doubt several basic biblical principles, particularly God's goodness. My response was to chastise myself for my lack of faith and to keep ignoring my doubts. This just led to a gradual increase of guilt. It was only when I started to face my questions and diligently search the Scripture for an answer that I began to feel peace again. In fact, after my time of doubt and seeking, I was much more grounded in my faith, and I am much closer to Christ because of it. Rather than avoid my doubt, I held tight to Scripture, reminding myself daily of the truth I knew from God. Since then, 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 remains as one of my favorite passages. I often remind myself of the Lord's words, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (New American Standard Bible).

As time went on, my friend's spiritual condition plummeted. She saw no hope for healing and was convinced that God had deserted her. This is where I began to doubt God's love. I knew that He loves everyone and that He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4), but I was also confronted with such passages as, "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" (Romans 9:22) What if my friend was a "vessel prepared for destruction?" One night I glared at God and said in my heart, "No, God. *You* did this to her. I can't believe that you love her." From that point on, I stopped searching for answers. Although I apologized shortly after my rant, I avoided the question of His all-encompassing love and slowly grew apart from Him. It took six months for me to finally stop avoiding God and face my questions.

The Lord is more than okay with questions—He encourages it. For example, the



writer of Acts specifically commends the Bereans in Acts 17:11 for not just “receiv[ing] the word with great eagerness,” but also for “examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things [that Paul spoke to them] were so.” They questioned what Paul said and then evaluated it with Scripture. It was only after they compared Paul’s claims about Jesus’ to the truth given in the Old Testament that they decided to follow Christ. The Bereans honored Paul and the Lord by taking his message seriously enough to confirm it with Scripture.

Asking questions is a vital part for both the development of the artist and the development of the Christian. A curious mind opens the artist to new possibilities and creativity. It also drives curious souls to know more about their Creator. Bob Grahmann (2001) of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship said in his article on “The Biblical Basis of Asking Questions and Seeking Answers” that “good Bible study puts an emphasis on curiosity, on asking good questions and seeking deeply into the text for answers” (p. 1). A curious mind leads one to greater discovery and deeper understanding, leading the artist to new creations and the Christian to a closer walk with Christ.

### **Shimmers of Truth in Rooted Research**

While diving into a sea of questions often delights us with new discoveries and a closer knowledge of God and our craft, it is also vital that we remain tethered to the truth of Scripture and the world of the play. The waves of the ocean of our creativity are powerful and exciting, but they can also be dangerous. Caught up in the world of our mind, our own thoughts can spin us in circles and turn us upside down, easily carrying us away from our homeland of the text. Character and designs developed apart from the script will exist as strangers to the world of the play. Likewise, if we develop our own

understanding of truth apart from Scripture, we will become strangers to God's kingdom.

Stanislavski (1989) teaches us this important lesson for acting in his book *An Actor Prepares*. The young student Kostya, representing Stanislavski's younger self, is at the beginning of his career when his instructor assigns him a scene from Shakespeare's *Othello*. Kostya has "hardly read two pages" when he "declaim[s] the text" and begins to practice the actions which he imagines best fit "a genuine warrior" (p. 2). However, as rehearsals continue, he finds that his portrayal of Othello clashes with the very lines he delivers. Kostya explains in his diary, "I had read the text of the role by itself, I had played the character by itself, without relating the one to the other" (p. 5).

Young Kostya's mistake was that he tried to play his role separate from the script, while he should have instead rooted it in the script. An actor will never be able to properly represent a character without understanding that character's life and personality. Imagination is important, but when Kostya took his imagination outside the guidance of the script, he created a character outside the world of the script. Rather than creating a unique and detailed character from the complexity of Shakespeare's masterpiece, he threw together an Othello defined by his own stereotypical understanding of a Moor. Kostya's Othello only belonged in Kostya's Venice and Cyprus. He was a stranger in Shakespeare's world.

Even more than in acting, directing requires us to become experts of our scripts. Directors march ahead of their company, holding high the vision for the entire artistic team to see, engage, and follow. As directors, if we lose touch with our script, we will lead our entire company outside of the playwright's world, resulting in art and design that remain foreign to the words and the story of the play. Understanding the various

conflicts, characters, and plot structure gives us the knowledge we need to bring our production to a place of beauty without abandoning the script's homeland (Patterson, 2004, p. 25-59).

Lastly, designers must dig into the script to unearth inspiration and to cultivate a well-balanced integration of their design with the production. In their book titled *Lighting and the Design Idea*, Linda Essig and Jennifer Setlow (2013) explain how returning again and again to the script "can enhance the openness of the imagination as well as development of alertness to the needs of the script and expectations of the creative team" (p. 85). Lighting designers often additionally break down the script into scenes, helping them "to develop a point of view toward the work as well as to take note of the physical requirements of the script" (p. 86). Costume and set designers also perform intense analysis, using the script to fortify and fuel their creations. All this is done to garnish a deeper understanding of the story in order to bring it to life with more vivid and striking detail.

Just as staying rooted in the text of the play gives us a solid foundation for our art in theatre, rooting ourselves in Scripture is crucial for the power and validity of our faith. Faith begins with knowing what is true (Torrence, 2011, October 2). This requires a supernatural message from God because even though creation hints at "His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature" (Romans 1:20b), we are not wise enough to fully understand who He is through creation. We know this from 1 Corinthians 1:21a, which says, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God." Romans 10:14a also tells us how essential it is that we hear the truth from someone other than ourselves by exclaiming, "How then will they call on Him in whom

they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?"

According to Moo (2000), we desperately need knowledge that we cannot imagine up by ourselves (p. 351). Romans 10:17 summarizes, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

So, if real faith requires real knowledge, where do we get that knowledge? The best place to get accurate knowledge about God, life, and reality is from God's Word.

2 Timothy 3:16 testifies to the accuracy of Scripture in saying, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." This word "inspired" does not mean that the writers of the Bible were simply given a few creative ideas. It literally means "God-breathed" (MacArthur, 1995, p. 138-143). Furthermore, Jesus Himself describes the intense detail of the Scripture by declaring in Matthew 5:18, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished." This means that not the smallest word or letter is by accident (MacArthur, 1985, p. 262). We can count on God's Word to get it right every time.

Staying in the Word is not just important at the beginning of our Christian walk. It is something we do daily. Whenever I think of the importance of Scripture I am reminded of a quote from John Piper where he exclaims, "Eat Bible. It's more important than breakfast—I promise you. Eat Bible!" (1983c) Psalm 1:2 describes the blessed man as one whose "delight is in the law of the Lord," who also meditates on it "day and night." The more we stay in God's Word, the more it will infiltrate our lives on a day-to-day basis.

Studying the text is important both in our Christian walk and in our theatrical art.

Randall Price stated, “Faith is only as good as that in which it is placed” (p. 2). Without a solid understanding of Scripture, we may accidentally believe something contrary to the truth. Faith is useless if it is placed in something untrue. Likewise, without a strong understanding of the script of a show, a theatrical artist may accidentally create something out of sync with the story. Similar to faith, individual art in theater is only as good as its contribution to and harmonization with the original story. As both Christians and artists, it is vital that we stay rooted in the foundation of the truth of our text. This is the only way that we will be able to withstand the crashing waves of our impulsive minds and remain safely tethered to the truth of our world.

### **Shimmers of Truth in Elusive Emotion**

While the facts of the text are vital for keeping us from wandering outside the world of the play, if our work is all knowledge and no emotion, sometimes it becomes mechanical and fake. At the very worst, it becomes a simple display of research. Meher Baba was an Indian mystic who has a thought-provoking explanation of the creation of art. He said, “Art is one of the sources through which the soul expresses itself and inspires others. But to express art thoroughly, one must have the inner emotions opened thoroughly” (as cited in Purdom, 1976, p. 253). An actor cannot simply know the text. Anyone can memorize a few lines and regurgitate them on command, and a good number of people can even back those lines up with modest displays of emotion. A few of them are somewhat convincing. However, it takes a true artist to live a role with authentic emotion. Émile Zola put it well when he said that actors should “not *play*; but rather *live* before the audience” (as cited in Benedetti, 1976, p. 41). The actor must not just understand the role, but also truthfully live the role onstage.

In her book titled *Respect for Acting*, Uta Hagen (1973) argues, “I believe that the illustration of a character’s behavior at the cost of removing one’s own psyche, no matter how brilliant the performance that results, creates an alienation between audience and actor” (p. 12). She then explains that while the audience may still love a performance that lacks emotional honesty, their applause will only be for the “visible skill” of the actor. If we just act on the outside, we will lose an invaluable connection to the audience. This does not mean that we abandon research. Hagen herself devotes nearly a quarter of her book to script analysis. However, our final goal should be to become “a human being on stage” (p. 11).

Stanislavski also “sought inner truth, the truth of feeling and experience.” He explains that he is not merely “seeming” to be a role, but actually “being” it onstage (as cited in Benedetti, 1976, p. 42). In order to do this, he combines an understanding of his character and the circumstances in the play with his imagination of what it would be like if he actually were that character. In his book *An Actor Prepares*, he explains to young actors, “If you are successful in this, you will find that ‘sincere emotions,’ or ‘feelings that seem true’ will spontaneously grow in you” (1989, p. 55). By believing in the reality of the story, Stanislavski was able to create truth onstage.

Sanford Meisner emphasized truth in acting as a result of listening and responding to other characters and events on the stage. He encourages us never to “do anything unless something happens to make [us] do it” (Meisner & Longwell, 1987, p. 34). To impress this lesson on his students, he developed a number of listening exercises. The students begin by repeating the same word back and forth to each other, always listening and responding as if they do not know what their partner would say. By listening to each

other onstage, they are able to “get out of [their] head[s]” and “induce real emotion” (p. 47). This is because emotions are always a result of something. He concludes one of his lessons by affirming a student’s realization that, “Truthfulness... It is the basis of being truthful” (p. 36).

Just as acting requires emotional truth, our faith is incomplete without authentic emotion. When asked what the greatest commandment in all the Law was, Jesus responded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Pastor Woody Torrence (2011, October 9) from Forest, Virginia, once commented in a sermon, “We can no more command our heart to love than command our heart to beat.” Loving God is one of the most difficult elements of our faith because the heart is not something that we can control. However, the Bible clearly commands in numerous passages that we are to love Him. This love is not just a love by actions, but a love which expresses itself as joy (Piper, 1983a).

Love goes beyond actions. The Bible shows us this in 1 Corinthians 13, the most famous love chapter in Scripture. This chapter clearly separates love from knowledge, faith, acts of service and giving, and even self-punishment. Even the action of giving away “all [your] possessions to feed the poor” is itself not love. In fact, Paul describes it as profitless if it is not accompanied by love (Piper, 1983b).

John Piper (1983a) said in a sermon titled “The Happiness of God: Foundation for Christian Hedonism,” “Joy in God is not optional icing on the cake of Christian duty. It is the essence—or at least, lest I overstate it, at least an essential part of saving faith.” Love is not an option—it is a command. In Deuteronomy 28:47, God punished the Israelites because they “did not serve the Lord [their] God with joy and a glad heart.” Instead, they

just did it out of duty. As we already know from Jesus, all of God's commandments are rooted in the act of loving Him. Thus, it is not even possible to fulfill duty to God without loving Him because our "duty" *includes* loving Him. It is by our love for Him that we come to follow Him.

We now have this dilemma that we must do something that we cannot control. We must love God. In his sermon on loving God, Woody (2011) concluded, "You cannot cause yourself to love God. You have to realize that you have to ask Him to cause you to love Him." Do not forget that while we may not be able to control our emotions, God certainly can grant us such things as faith and love. The first place we should turn to increase our love is God.

While we cannot will ourselves to love, we can do things that cause our love to grow. 1 John 4:19 tells us, "We love because He first loved us." Love for God is not something we will out of ourselves. Just as Meisner teaches that emotions in acting come as a response to our partners, the Bible considers our love for God as a natural response to the love that He has already shown us. One way to grow in love for God is to grow in understanding of Him. While knowledge of God is not enough by itself, often knowledge of God can lead to love of God. Similar to how Stanislavski encourages us to focus on our given circumstances in the script to develop our emotions, the more we know about God and the more our thoughts dwell on Him, the more we will naturally grow to love Him.

Faith requires more than just knowledge of the truth, but also an emotional reaction. Likewise, acting requires more than just a head knowledge of the character. In the Christian walk, our love for God comes as a response to who He is and what we learn of



Him in Scripture. For the actor, emotions arise as a direct response from other characters and situations onstage, supported by information derived from the script.

This makes perfect sense because a character onstage is simply the recreation of a real human. We are to serve God with all our beings, and the Scripture makes it clear that our emotions are an important part of that. If God considers emotions to be an essential part of how we devote ourselves to Him, then it must be that emotions are also an essential part of who we are. Thus, it is only natural that if emotions are an essential element for the Christian life that they also be essential to the life of a character onstage. As you continue in your quest for excellence in your craft and closeness with Christ, remember to always remain honest in your love for God and your recreation of humanity on the stage.

### **Shimmers of Truth in Taking Action**

Emotions are a slippery thing. Sometimes they can leak out of us at the worst moments, and at others we are left stone cold. An acquaintance asking a simple, “How are you?” can result in a quivering smile, swiftly broken by a flood of tears. In another situation, we may unwrap a tacky sweater for Christmas—complete with giant red hearts and sparkling ribbons—while an excited aunt waits with an anticipating grin that clearly says, “Isn’t it great?” Trying to simply leak out emotion rarely results in an authentic performance, regardless of how real the anger, tears, or any other signs of emotion may be. This is because emotions are a by-product. They cannot exist unless they result from something else. As we already discussed, this can be a problem in both our stage life and our Christian walk. However, while emotions are often fickle, one thing we do have control over on and off the stage is our actions.

Meisner (1987) considers “the reality of doing” as the “foundation of acting” (p. 16). Furthermore, he teaches that “[e]very play is based upon the reality of doing (p. 25). A story is not a pattern of various colors of emotions painted on the faces of various characters. A story tells us what *happens*. Uta Hagen (1973) recommends for actors to even go so far as to cross out any adjectives in the script that script the emotion of a character. She explains, “If you should happen to smile or frown or feel sad or glad or furious or frustrated or shy or loving, it will be a *result* of your particularizations for each object, person, event or circumstance—and the result of the give and take of actions” (p. 185). Emotions reveal the heart, but actions often change the heart.

In this, we can see that outward action can actually influence an actor’s emotions. This is because our bodies have grown used to associating specific physical feelings with specific emotions. Stanislavski (1963) remarks, “The spirit cannot but respond to the actions of the body, provided of course that these are genuine, have a purpose, and are productive” (p. 9). The act of slamming your hand down on a table can increase your anger. The force of your hand hitting the table creates a surge of energy that courses up through your shoulder, causing your muscles to tighten. The actor can also affect the emotions by adjusting the voice and breath. Changing your breathing to short and intense, shallow breaths can encourage fear and hysteria. Like anger, our body is used to associating this feeling with specific emotions. Thus, just as emotions can encourage action, action can work as a trigger for emotion.

Just as taking action onstage can lead to emotion, choosing to follow God even when we do not feel like it can often lead us to love Him more (Murray, 2010, p. 91). While emotions are often elusive, the will is something that we have full control over. That

being said, choosing to follow the commands of God is best when it is a result of an emotional response to the knowledge of God (p. 90). An example of this is laid out in Romans 2:4 where it informs us that “the kindness of God leads [us] to repentance.” By learning intellectually of the kindness of God and having an emotional reaction, we choose to respond in repentance.

On the other hand, we must accept the fact that there are times where we will not always emotionally feel close to God. This may be from something obvious such as confusion about life circumstances, questions about other people’s choices, or even our own sin. However, there are times when God simply seems to go silent. Clayton King (2011), a pastor at Liberty University, once called this “God’s mysterious disappearance.” I experienced this during that dark time of my roommate’s illness. Looking back, I can now see that even though I often did not feel God’s presence, He always granted me His peace.

One reason for this “disappearance” is to teach us to trust Him even when we cannot feel Him emotionally. This is quite common in the Psalms. Psalm 13 opens with David’s cry, “How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” However, by the end of the Psalm he stands by his trust in God, proclaiming, “But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation” (Psalm 13:5). He lastly reflects on God’s faithfulness in the past rejoicing, “I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me” (Psalm 13:6).

We do not always feel the emotions that we ought to. This is understandable, especially considering the slippery nature of emotions. In both our Christian walk and the craft of acting, a good solution for this is choosing to do something connected to that

emotion. An actor pursues something they want with an action. A Christian pursues serving God. Pursuing something with our actions often leads to emotions, but as Christians we must be careful never ultimately to replace love with duty (Torrence, 2011, October 16). Service to God is good, but when love begins to wane and we cease to seek joy in Him, our actions become empty.

When you cannot feel God, hold fast to what you know of him from Scripture. Hold tight to that truth, and continue to walk in His ways. Sometimes just as emotions cause us to want to serve Him, serving Him can lead us to loving Him. In fact, this works with not just God but also people. If there are people in your life whom you have a hard time loving, consider doing small acts of service for them. Look out for their good. Often our actions can change our heart. When we get used to actively serving someone else, love often naturally follows.

### **Shimmers of Truth in the Inevitable End**

I want control. I think if I could just *know* what was going to happen the rest of my life, I would not worry so much. At least, that is what I tell myself. It is something we have all thought at some point in our lives. If we could just know who we are going to marry, then we would not waste our time and hearts on losers who are just going to walk out on us. If we could just know where our careers will take us, then we could fully prepare ourselves for every promotion and responsibility dropped on us in the future. Sometimes we just want to know the end. In theatre, we already know the end. We have read the script. The playwright has already laid out all of the events, the crises, and the solutions. We simply need to present them to the audience. However, as any artist immersed in theatre knows, this is not an easy feat. Stanislavski (1963) explains the

balance between knowing the end and living the moment in saying, “Actually Hamlet, as a figure in a play...knows nothing of what the future has in store for him, whereas the actor who plays the part must bear this constantly in mind; he is obliged to keep in perspective” (p. 109). Although we know the end of the script, we must tell the story as if the end is still undetermined, living each moment as if it is the first time. At the same time, we must play the role as an artist aware of the direction the script will take in order to stay in-sync with the overall message of the story.

We can see this in the character Jud Fry in the classic American musical *Oklahoma!* The actor playing Jud knows the whole time that he will die and never have Laurey. However, even though the actor knows that Jud will die, Jud does not know it. If the actor plays the end at the beginning of the show, then Jud will spend the whole show dreading his impending, unavoidable death. While he is not exactly a sunny character, he is has not given up on life. He has dreams and aspirations just like any other character. At the same time, the actor still needs to keep the perspective of the whole play. Ultimately, Jud is not the hero, and the actor needs to keep his portrayal of Jud within the purpose of the story. However, he cannot let this awareness change the way he lives Jud in the moment (Rodgers, Hammerstein II, Hornblow, & Zinnemann, 2005). The way Meisner (1987) put it, “[P]reparation lasts only for the first moment of the scene, and then you never know what’s going to happen” (p. 79).

This fusion of a pre-determined end and a human living in the present has a very significant parallel in the Christian life. One of the most difficult biblical concepts for us to grasp is the fact that while God is sovereign, we somehow still have a free will and are held accountable for all of our actions. This seems contradictory because if God has

control over everything that happens, then it seems that we must not be able to make our own decisions. On the other hand, the Bible's countless verses on our decision to choose God over the world also seems to assume that we have an ability to make a choice. Even the fact that millions of people defy God's law every day and sin against Him is itself a strong argument for the existence of free will. Nevertheless, we know God is sovereign.

If you think about it, a play is quite similar to real life. Each tells a story, has characters who make decisions, and are written by a higher being who has control over the whole. When we watch *Oklahoma!*, do we turn our noses up at Rodgers and Hammerstein in disgust, blaming them for Jud's actions? Even though they wrote the musical, in the world of the play Jud is still a person who makes his own decisions. We understand this and, of course, blame Jud for the choices he makes.

It seems that if God is in control over everything, then we should not be held responsible for our sin. After all, it does not seem to make sense that we are held accountable to Him for sin which only can occur within His Own sovereign will (Geisler, 2010, p. 31). Unfortunately for this argument, Romans 9 describes this situation by explaining God's choice of Jacob over Esau, as well as His hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Verse 16 explains, "[I]t does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy," and verse 18 reiterates that God "has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." Finally, the next verse asks the million dollar question, "...Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" And the answer? It is none of our business. Romans 9:20 says, "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?"

While we know that God is sovereign, it is also very difficult to claim that the Bible

does not also describe us as beings with free will. At the beginning of time, God placed Adam and Eve in the garden and gave them a choice to sin or not to sin. Because He *gave them a choice*, one would think that Adam and Eve thus *had an ability to choose* (Geisler, 2010, p. 34). Not only does God not cause us to sin, James 1:13-15 tells us that He does not even tempt us to sin, telling us, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God;’ for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.” The verse goes on to say that instead, “each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.” The next verse continues with presenting sin as a result of us being “carried away and enticed by [our] own lust” (Society of Evangelical Arminians, 2010). Lastly, God made us in order to have a relationship with us, and this relationship requires a love by choice. If God had not given us the ability to make choices, than we could not truly love God (Geisler, 2010, p. 89).

As we sit here with a cloud above our heads, trying fervently to figure out God, it is easy to forget the simple fact that God is... well, God. He can do abundantly more than we can imagine (Ephesians 3:20). His logic is far above ours. In fact, what makes us assume that the free will He gave us must conflict with His sovereignty? It makes much more sense to assume that both exist at the same time, regardless of the fact that we cannot understand how (Macleod, 1941, p. 9).

While an Author already determines the future of our lives and our characters’ lives, we and our characters still live in full freedom to make our own choices. Rogers and Hammerstein wrote *Oklahoma!*, so they decided Jud’s fate. However, Jud makes his own decisions throughout the entire musical, eventually leading to his death. As Christians and actors, the best response to this knowledge of a determined plot is to live fully aware

of the complete sovereignty of the Author over all situations, all the while taking responsibility for our own actions. We are to live knowing that while the end has been decided, our lives still require us to make our own decisions. It is not biblical to simply live in irresponsibility under the belief that all things happen only as a result of God. Like the actor, we must live knowing the end, yet responding in a world that has not yet reached it.

### **Shimmers of Truth in the Vision**

We love sharing our opinions. As artists, our minds are constantly bouncing ideas around—and sometimes inside-out and upside-down. It is our job to dream and to nurture thoughts and images until they grow into lavish landscapes and rich realities. However, as we have already discussed, if we do not anchor these ideas to something, we can easily lose our grasp of how our individual art fits into the script's overall story. While the text works as our guide for technical details, we still need someone to have the authority to guide us all together in the world of our art. This person is the director.

As theatrical artists we must align our work to fit the purpose and concept set out by our director. At the very beginning of the design process for a show, the director will study the script and decide on a concept and message that will guide the production. Jim Patterson (2004) defines this concept as “an articulated guiding metaphor that will unite the playscript with the stage production and thus individualize [the show]” (p. 75). The director leads the vision of the production.

All the designers on the team must then use this concept in their individual areas of expertise for the show. Essig and Setlow (2013) explain, “The designers must conceptualize the visual elements of a production so that they are working toward the



implementation of shared ideas” (p. 5). The director is the one to guide the direction of these shared ideas. If one designer goes off on their own in their design, they compromise the consistency of the production. While they may create something unique and beautiful, it will likely clash with the rest of the world on the stage.

This having been said, the designer still needs to be allowed room for creativity. Rebecca Cunningham (1984) in her book *The Magic Garment* argues, “While the director is the guiding force behind the production, a good director knows how to give the design team an indication of the style desired without squelching their creativity” (p. 10). The director is not a dictator. Rather, the director guides the artistic team in the general direction of the production. He or she inspires us in a way that causes us to create art that all belongs in the same world.

Just as we give over the direction and purpose of our art to the director’s concept, we also need to give over the direction and purpose of our lives to the Lord’s glory. The Westminster Catechism considers the “chief end of man” to be “to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever” (Westminster Assembly, 1647, p. 1). Our purpose on earth is not to promote ourselves. Rather, everything serves the purpose of displaying the glory and majesty of the most holy and worthy being in the universe. In fact, we are better off when the glory is focused on God because that is how we were made. This also means that regardless of how we feel, it is always right, proper, and desirable to give up all we have for God. Anything outside of Him is a waste of our time.

We automatically glorify God with our actions (Morgan, 2010, p. 131). In Isaiah 60:21, God says, “Then all your people will be righteous; they will possess the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified.” In

this verse, God explains how Israel's righteousness and blessings are all for the purpose of His glory. Romans 5:18-6:7 even comments on how our sin can reveal the glory of God by showing His amazing grace. This does not give us license to intentionally sin, but is rather a testimony to the all-encompassing quality of His glory.

However, glorifying God is also a decision we choose to make (MacArthur, 1984, p. 248-249). Countless places in the Bible command us to refer glory to Him. One of the most well known ones is 1 Corinthians 10:31, which tells us, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." I Corinthians 6:20 points out that we "have been bought with a price" and are to "therefore glorify God in [our] bod[ies]." In Philippians 1:9-11, Paul comments on how he prays that the believers in Philippi will grow in love and righteousness specifically "to the glory and praise of God." I have found that there are three basic ways that we can glorify God.

First of all, we glorify Him by making Him the motivation for all we do (Krauter, 1996, p. 74). In Isaiah 6, Isaiah sees the Lord in a dream seated on a majestic throne in a temple, surrounded by fantastical beings who sing and shout of the holiness and glory of God. Their voices hold so much power that the very foundations of the temple shake, and Isaiah falls down in anguish over his own ugliness and sin. Lord calls out, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" and Isaiah jumps up, crying, "Here am I. Send me!" God is so glorious that Isaiah has no other response but to offer himself. We do what we do not because we want to be rich or famous, but because God is great. This fact brings Him glory.

We also give glory to God by living by His power instead of our own (Platt, 2010, p. 48). I Peter 4:11 says that

whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God;  
whoever serves is to do so a one who is serving by the strength which God  
supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

God gets glory when we live and follow Him by His strength instead of relying on our own abilities. For example, working in the theater often results in late nights, especially around tech week. There are two ways that we can make it through an all-nighter in the theatre. The most common is to rely on our own strength, ability, and perseverance to get through the night. This approach works, and there is nothing immoral about it. However, if we simply get that energy and dedication from our passion for theatre, we miss out on the opportunity to glorify God by receiving strength from Him. Rather than just push through the night, we should focus on giving our work over to God and asking Him for strength and peace. This glorifies Him because it acknowledges Him as the best place to give us what we need. Late nights like these can even end up as blessings by bringing us closer to Him. When we are weak, we have the chance to experience the power of Christ (2 Corinthians 12:9).

We can also give glory to God simply by giving Him credit for everything that He does in us and for everything that He is. Worship itself is proclaiming who He is and finding joy in it (Quicke, 2011, p. 260). David worships God for who He is all throughout the Psalms with such proclamations as, “The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of my salvation” (Psalm 18:46). Acknowledging all He has done in and through us also brings Him glory because it puts a spotlight on His integral involvement in the history of our lives and the world. For example, Paul tells us in Romans 4:20 how Abraham gave glory to God when “he did not waver in unbelief but

grew strong in faith.” God gave Abraham the motivation and strength to do something, and Abraham gave Him credit for it.

Whether we are sacrificing ourselves for God’s purpose, or sacrificing our ideas for the director’s concept, life often requires giving up our own plans and desires for the sake of a greater purpose. The ultimate example of this is seen in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Even in the face of intense torture and death, when He asked that the “cup pass from Him,” He still concluded with, “Yet not my will, but yours be done” (Matthew 26:39b, New International Version).

### **Conclusion**

We artists live in a magical world where thoughts can become realities and our minds are let loose to imagine. It is a rare blessing that we get to immerse ourselves in daily. Somehow, we have found a career which gives us the duty to dream. This craft is not a separate compartment of our lives that accompanies our Christians walks. It is filled with reflections of God, small shimmers of truth that can instruct and remind us of the reality of the Christian life. Theatre is not void of God—the very craft emulates Him.

I wrote this devotional as an encouragement for you, my fellow theatrical artists. However, this is only a small sampling of the abundant reflections of truth in theatre. These truths are scattered all throughout our art and work, like tiny diamonds nestled in the crevices of a spectacular cavern. While the cavern is captivating, the gems are priceless. Do not live this life in theatre and miss the gems of truth. Continue to grow in your craft, and as your creativity and skills flourish, persist in the sharpening of your spiritual eyeglass. Discover and relish the treasures of theatre, and always remember the

prevasive presense of a Power higher and more magestic than anything this world has to offer.

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