

# The Work of the People *Creating Our Way Through* 5 Films on Art & Salvation

## ***Introduction***

*Art...is a means of union among [humans], joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress toward well-being of individuals and of humanity.* —Leo Tolstoy, adapted for inclusion from his essay *What is Art?*

When I was 19 and struggling, my father sent me to a woman who performed a body work practice called Rolfing. Its a form of realignment for the body that happens by manipulating and moving the fascia, a thin sheath that covers muscles. The process starts with ten sessions, once a week, if memory serves me well.

In the early sessions, I would talk in overdrive while she would suggest I get quiet, breathe, and focus. Over time, breathing became more of a requirement than an option because the intensity of the restructure was intensely painful. I had to shut up and let my body talk to me. I needed to listen, and the situation gave me no choice. I was learning to take feedback. It was through those sessions that I began to also experience a spiritual breakthrough. Besides feeling feelings again, I also began to write and draw again, something that had shut down over the course of years of challenging life issues.

The first piece that emerged was a sketch of a fist breaking through a cinderblock wall. I could hardly believe my eyes at my ability to express on paper what I felt was happening in my body, heart, and mind. The process of the body work made a way for solidified and stored emotional trauma and old beliefs to shift and move, and it was healing. That drawing was followed by a whole lot of terrible, God-awful poetry that mattered. Just words tumbling out that had been stuck who-knows-where in my body and mind. With those blocks removed, I let it flow.

This was the beginning of me remembering myself as a creative being, not the mechanical, maintenance minded, “stuff-my-stuff-down-deep-so-that-no-one-knows-I-suffer” hidden, stoic person that I had become. It was one of many awakenings to who I am, where I stand on this planet, and what I am meant for.

This expressed healing was my first inkling of human spirituality as an emerging adult. Art gave me a way to move through the pain of that which was seemingly immovable. It also helped me express mysterious fullnesses and the sense of intense beauty post-processing all the hurt.

I took this piece of work to the woman who restructured me, an act which, at that time, was the most vulnerable thing I had ever done. More than exposing my fallibility to her, which I wore clearly as someone who didn't really like myself, I risked letting her in on something greater about myself. Something amazing happening to me. I stammered and stuttered my way through the gifting of the piece, I sweated and second guessed myself. She, though, was intrigued and enamored. Art opened up more than a way for me to get unstuck, it opened up a way to deepen a friendship.

Art has allowed me to express my growth process into a viable human being. It is a record of the back and forth flow from singularity to solidarity. It helps me say what I cannot say or am not ready to speak, and has the ability to enjoin me to others who are wanting and willing to connect. Art, then, becomes a living record of the expanse of the human experience that brings us into relationship with one another. A communion.

*Perhaps that is because humans are made and modeled after an observant, curious God to be creative and to express our life's experiences together. We are made to be generative. Even on our dullest days we are creating thoughts, beliefs, movement.*

Like Rene August suggests about God in *Describing the Indescribable*, some things are hard to communicate fully because any description of it isn't really the whole truth about it. Co-creation—the art of living, breathing, creating with God—is one of those topics for me.

We create to emulate.

We create to resuscitate.

We create because we bleed.

We create to heal.

We create to both die and rebirth.

We create because we cannot help it!

Humans happen to be so creative that we manage to create in as many ways as there are of us! Use this time to consider all the ways your creativity is a pathway to your growth and healing and movement towards oneness. Towards atONement.

Why did you seek out a series about art/creativity? Has art been part of your salvation story? How have you seen art heal? Enjoin? Expand Love?

### *Usefulness*

Throughout this curriculum, consider the reflections I offer as something I might talk about if I were in the room with you or a member of your group. I am connecting with an aspect or idea within the film, and sharing humanity with you because the only expertise I have to offer is what I have grown to know for myself or that which has been taught to me by people I love and trust. Like Travis Reed often says, I can only pass on to you what has been passed on to me. This is the heart from which I share: I want to connect.

I understand that I cannot possibly hit all meaningful aspects of human creativity and our expression of God, life, love, pain, growth in such a short piece. The hope is that God's invitation to each and every one of us to a greater awareness to the healing that comes through co-creating with God and one another is highlighted.

You may be using this curriculum on your own or with a faith-based group, either way we ask God to bless you with stillness, willingness, and curiosity about yourself and God. I recommend carving a few minutes out before each film to breathe and "get present". Sometimes we jump from one thing to the next without awareness. To me, it's worth adding in a few minutes in a few key spaces just to take some deep breaths and remember you are here and now, and God is too.

Journaling is a good way to catch your flow and overflow. If you don't have a journal, grab some paper and something to write with and go for it. Just let what comes up for you be what it is without judgment, use curiosity, follow inspiration. If you don't write or doodle, grab a piece of clay, a guitar, some string...I don't know. What do you have laying around? Pillage through the recycle bin. Find something you can put together or pull apart! I am trusting you will find your way.

I have also included instructions on an ancient practice called a Visio Divina that you can use throughout the series with a selection of visual art that you choose. You can search for images on the internet, head down to a local gallery to find what calls to you, or even discover something at your home that you have never really spent time with! What you are looking for is something that evokes some sort of response in you, follow your gut on this, and let Spirit do the rest.

I have included a simple opening prayer that you can use to open before or after each film, or create your own! That is what this is all about, right? So, slow down, get quiet and breathe. Become willing to open up to God's movement through the beauty-filled voices and inspiring ideas in these films. It's time to open, beloveds.

### **Visio Divina: A Suggested Practice**

A Visio Divina is a method of prayer that uses art to lead you towards God's movement within. Throughout this study, consider finding art that evokes feeling in you for contemplation.

1. Become present. Breathe. Close your eyes. Ask for God's blessing.
2. Open your eyes and gaze at your selected image. Welcome the image, let your eyes roll over it and take it all in. What strikes you? What does your eye want to drink in? Use a journal to write down your first thoughts. Then rest your eyes for a few minutes and breathe.
3. Open your eyes and observe your piece a second time. Let your eyes lead you. What are you drawn to? What are you starting to uncover? Write about this deeper sense. Close your eyes again and breathe.
4. Open your eyes and gaze for a final time. Allow Spirit to bring forward a message for you; a word, a phrase, or an emotion. Don't judge what comes up, just allow. What does this communicate to your life today? Write about this emergence in your journal.
5. Spend time with God. With all this revealed, leave your heart open to God for just a bit longer. Let God roll around in all that has been exposed. Experience God's engaged healing response to your heart opening with thankfulness. Take what you have learned into the world.

### **Opening/Closing Prayer**

Bless us to bear communion, O God.  
To bear our own becoming—  
    breathe through us,  
    sculpt through us,

paint through us—  
call us to you to explore, create and to play.

Inspire our being, God,  
teach us how to hum Your frequency,  
to open up, blur the lines, expand.

Do not withhold that stroke of genius,  
the alarming red that awakens  
to something greater, something more...

Be with us in the chaotic mess,  
as we co-create our way through life alongside you,  
let us be shapable, let us be mendable,  
let us be willing to come alive with you.

- Kelly Ann Hall

This series includes 5 sessions:

**SESSION ONE //** Describing the Indescribable with René August

**SESSION TWO //** Amnesia Therapy with Marlon Hall

**SESSION THREE //** The Artisan Soul with Erwin Raphael McManus

**SESSION FOUR //** Crucified for All with Malcolm Guide

**SESSION FIVE //** Creation Heals with Lanecia Rouse Tinsley

Series on The Work of the People here:

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/bundle/creating-our-way-through>

## **SESSION ONE // Describing the Indescribable with René August**

*(A veteran of the anti-apartheid movement and an Anglican priest, René August is a reconciliation trainer with The Warehouse, a worshipping community organization in Cape Town, South Africa that walks alongside churches as they seek to respond to the issues of poverty, injustice, and division in a city that struggles with some of the worst inequality in the world).*

### ***Watch Film***

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/describing-the-indescribable>

### ***Going Deeper***

*Art invites us into a conversation where our words have very little value, and so we enter silently. We have to shut up and listen. You have to shut up and be opened. You have to stop and look deeply. And so it engages all of my senses. How else to you engage with a God that is indescribable? And so it invites me into mystery, and into different interpretations, and is a reminder of beauty. —René August*

When it comes to describing God, it seems we can only ever get a piece of the whole truth. Words fail us when it comes to God's entirety and immensity. How do you value the words you use to describe God and the sacred story including your part and place in it?

How do you express friendship/relationship with God?

What is your picture of God? How has your picture of God changed/developed over the course of your lifetime? Consider a way you can express God with words or food or relationship or an art medium. Let yourself go into it as much as you can.

If God has curated the space where you reside, how do you respond to such divine inspiration? Where in your life does God invite you to be co-creative? How does that play out for you in community? In the world?

Has art been an opening experience for you? Describe how.

### ***Reflection***

*We are not equal to what we are able to produce. —René August*

Of course we aren't "equal to what we are able to produce," but someone has to tell our entrained minds that. We absolutely believe that we are valued by what we can earn or make or have been given. Which makes it risky to try our hand at expressing our inner artist.

We risk our ego.

We risk being offended.

We risk being offensive.

We risk failure.

We risk telling the truth, revealing secrets.

Withholding our creative expression isn't the answer, though. It keeps us from conscious contact with God. I know for me, when I shut down pathways or flow between God and my spirit, I suffer not feeling like my true self. I too easily forget that God went all in creating me to be who I am even so far as to attune every detail of our bodies and character.

I loved August's description of God's temple as an art gallery. It reminds me that I get to exist in God's craftsmanship for all of my life. As an added blessing, I also happen to be God's handiwork. It's humbling. Not one stroke of genius was spared during the creation of all things.

As God's image bearer, I, too delight in creating. After defecting from the church I used to sit outside on my driveway on sunny mornings practicing how to sketch tree bark or capture sunlight with pastels. I would crank up the music and work on letting go and letting something birth from the love shared between God and myself. Each day turning the page for a fresh beginning, a new part of the conversation to take shape. For years I just kept them in my sketchbook, treasuring them as individual life lessons.

Once I shared them with others, I started to consider framing them and hanging them on the wall of my house. It was during the hanging of these pieces that I started to see a beautiful landscape that was my life. I am not a professional artist, mind you. I have never had one lesson, and it's not the skill that brings value to me. It's the memory of what my heart was communicating and receiving as I healed and learned alongside God.

I have found many people along the way who have picked up on the current of the love that is alive and well and proactive still between my heart, my God, dusty

pastels, and paper. They remind me to be brave to create, and nowadays brave to share.

Years ago, I was a budding poet writing so much junk, and sharing work on an online forum. It was such a good school for me. Once I was upset about not feeling like I was good at writing as much as I believed I could be. I compared myself to about five other writers that seemed to really know their stuff. I will never forget what a friend said to me as I wrapped up a seemingly long, self-loathing monologue:

“I never knew art to be competitive.”

He literally crashed my pity party. I didn't have to be as talented as her?! I didn't have to be as witty as him?! I could just enjoy the process and be myself?! This new idea changed my trajectory as an artist. I will do you the favor of letting those words turn over in you like they did in me.

I am still pretty shy about my art because it comes from such a tender space, and God only knows how much breath work it takes for courage to set in, but I am not unique in my fears and I am not going to let my fear of not measuring up stop me from being truly alive, truly myself.

Because expressing oneself, for many of us, is intimidating, I say: *breathe and do your best to do it anyway*. Find a person to mentor you. Ask for these things and open your awareness to receive them. Fear is a great motivator, but greater than this is Love. Love reminds us, Love ensures us, Love compels us, Love expands us.

In whatever pain or isolation you find yourself in, if you can find love for yourself and your life, set your mind on it. Ask your heart to bring it to the forefront. Let Love be the guide to embolden you to move past any present fears of practicing expressing your creativity. I know the arts have become competitive, worldly things have broken into the arts and created a distorted version of the modalities of expression. This is intimidating...if you think your art will make you somebody.

Don't create because you want to be somebody.

Create because you are somebody.

Create because you exist.

Because you can.

Because you can't not.



Because this is how you respond to being alive—to being a work of art within a work of art—and how you let God know you have accepted the gift of your life and all that comes with it.

### **Practice**

Search for a piece of art that speaks to you and spend time with it using the Visio Divina practice. Afterwards, consider five minutes of conscious connection with God, opening further (as you can) to discover and be discovered.



## SESSION TWO // Amnesia Therapy with Marlon Hall

*(Marlon is a griot who enjoys telling stories. He uses photography, anthropology, filmmaking, and writing to share stories of love, imagination, and passion. He is the cultural architect and spiritual leader of The Awakenings Movement, a grassroots community of social visionaries and culture shapers in Houston, Detroit, and Nairobi. He lives presently out that architecture as the General Manager of The Eat Gallery, a gallery for emerging culinary artists that features art on plates where traditional galleries feature art on walls. He is the author of Wake Up: Hip Hop Christianity and the Black Church).*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/amnesia-therapy>

### **Going Deeper**

*Humanity experiences so much physical and emotional trauma from one generation to the next, art is the amnesia therapy that allows us to remember love sometimes lost in pain. To remember our humanity sometimes lost in the horror... —Marlon Hall*

Pain sometimes makes us want to forget. Its one of the ways, as my friend Dale Ryan says, we “stuff stuff” that we aren’t able to, or don’t want to feel. Do you “stuff stuff”? Do you run from pain?

“Salvation is a wholeness that takes over a person’s life, and art is a part of catalyzing wholeness. Nurturing wholeness...art informs our wholeness like nothing else can.” Let yourself soak in the possibility of wholeness. Of being on a wholeness path. There is beauty here, even with all the hard things that come onto a wholeness path. Ask to see the beauty, and find *your* way of expressing what you see.

If you could remember some of the things you want to forget or deny, what would they be? Make a list. Invite God to the list-making. You don’t have to do the work today, just make the list. Let God lead you through the work as it comes.

Do you observe your life? I have found it to be helpful to be curious more that critical off myself and others. It allows more grace somehow. Write down a few observances you notice about yourself around how you are a creative being already.

## ***Reflection***

*Art is not ancillary, art is primary to the work of renaissance... There is a way in which art is a thread woven into the fabric of our faith and by our faith that changes our world.*—Marlon Hall

When my life is jacked up, there are a handful of people that I choose from to call. In the beginning of my recovery, though, my go-to phone call was my dad. He would listen with great patience to my long unraveling and recoiling, all my complaints, fears, and excuses. He'd stay silent, sometimes agree, sometimes I could tell how challenging it was for him to withhold. In the end, I could count on him to ask me one question: "How is your art going?"

In the onslaught of stimulation, under the weight of real or perceived burdens, because we hurt, and, due to the fact that we are so often slave driven by our fears...we forget who we are and why we are. We forget God. We lose sight of beauty, and the gift of being "intact", of being completed by Spirit, becomes a faded memory. We forget what helps us and what heals us.

It happens.  
It's not just you.  
It's me. It's them.  
It's all of us.

We lose consciousness. We become deluded and live according to our illusions, a place that becomes quite comfortable. We shift our beliefs in subtle ways, just enough to communicate what we want to justify our movement away from pain—I have done this. I still run from pain sometimes. If I can create myself into a new reality on demand, then I don't have to face anything I don't want to, really, and therefore can move it out of sight and out of mind. This co-creates a belief that because I am able to manipulate my way around, then I may not really need to rely on God to go through—or for much of anything for that matter—and therefore God moves into my forgetting as well.

Forgetting my connection to God is a pathway to numbness for me. To unconscious living.

However, should I allow myself to become a "catalyst towards wholeness" as Hall suggests, then I am able to co-create my way T H R O U G H my pain. And, although God is ever-present in all situations and things, in this way I get to know

and be observant of God's presence in it with me. I can walk through consciously in real time (or even in retrospect with honor for the best I could do at the time).

I may see things differently.

I might open up other perspectives.

I might gain clarity, or find a hidden belief that needs liberation.

Maybe there is nothing to find but a heap of ash.

Soot everywhere.

But, I might find beauty in the ashes.

I may discover wholeness encompasses the infliction.

I might start to remember I am here to Love and be Loved in return.

I likely will look up from a messy, creative high and discover my brothers and sisters expressing it all right alongside me.

But I cannot just jump over the work to the reward. I have to write, sketch, color, cook, sing, breathe, yoga, embody, rebuild, walk, and allow God's and my way there.

I have to work my way from blindness into beholden-ness.

From neglected to begotten.

From old, useless, patterned belief to wholeheartedness, whole-mindedness.

We are not geared to want to go through it. In fact, we have to surrender to it. Let go. It usually happens when you can no longer cover your gaping wounds, so you quit trying. You are sort of flung into this abyss, this "no thing" that swallows you up but this time you are at peace with the course. You have come to the end of yourself, or perhaps the beginning of your new self...I don't want to spoil the ending for you.

Accepting that the path through is the creation path that heals will bring a new awareness. Will open up pathways to remember things you forgot. It will bring you to a new eye level with those around you, too, as you recognize yourself in everyone's story.

I will leave you with this prayer that helps orient a path through:

***The Welcoming Prayer (by Father Thomas Keating)***

Welcome, welcome, welcome.

I welcome everything that comes to me today

because I know it's for my healing.  
I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations, and conditions.  
I let go of my desire for power and control.  
I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval and pleasure.  
I let go of my desire for survival and security.  
I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person or myself.  
I open to the love and presence of God and  
God's action within.  
Amen.

### ***Practice***

Search for a piece of art that speaks to you and spend time with it using the Visio Divina practice. Afterwards, consider five minutes of conscious connection with God, opening further (as you can) to remember and be remembered.

## **SESSION THREE // The Artisan Soul with Erwin Raphael McManus**

*(Erwin Raphael McManus is an iconoclast known as a cultural pioneer for his integration of creativity and spirituality. He is an artist, entrepreneur, and cultural thought leader who is also the founder of MOSAIC, a community of faith in Los Angeles California).*

### ***Watch Film***

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/the-artisan-soul>

### ***Going Deeper***

How has your spirituality inspired creativity or your creativity inspired your spirituality?

Do you feel close to God during creating or expressing art?

How do you “look at the world around you with clear eyes”? How do you live out your most creative self?

How do you feel about making room for messiness?

How have you seen beauty emerge from your greatest failures?

For a moment, sit with an image McManus briefly mentioned in this film: assembly line humans. Where are you in the vision? What does this image evoke in you?

We are created in God’s image: beings who *materialize the invisible*. Being unleashed to create and imagine in each of our own unique way is the most God-like reflection we can be, living artfully then opens us up to authentic worship. We are paying tribute to our Creator by loving and living our life fully. What inspires you to be courageously alive?

### ***Reflection***

*The most accurate expression or definition of creativity is materializing the invisible. Every human being is actually creative. Every human being is, in truth, an artisan. The only thing you need to create art is a soul. —Erwin McManus*

Simple, whole ingredients. That is what we are made of.

Mind. Body. Spirit. Soul.

We completely over-complicate this. Yes, each of these ingredients have their intricacies, yet don't you agree that we are simple creatures with a complex?

I can only speak for myself, but I take myself way too seriously sometimes, and do a fairly consistent job at overcomplicating my life. I have had over a handful of times where I was stopped dead in my tracks wondering how I ended up at any given place at any given time. Once, perhaps the first time I recall, was during high school when I found myself wasted drunk, in and out of consciousness at the base of a tree in someone's backyard. Another time was when I was about to walk down the aisle to get married. Then, there was the amazing day when I was handed my first newborn child, and years later, the second, and once more with the third. There was the day I recognized I was drowning in depression.

There were several times that I wondered if I ever really chose anything, or if I just had gone along to the presumed "next thing". In my marriage I often would look across to my husband and see the same beaten look on his face. It was like our lives were mechanized to the point that we were just going through check boxes on a list: "Marriage, check. House, check. Kids, check." We were just "doing it", whatever "it" was to get "life" accomplished.

We were surviving our lives, being anything but truly ourselves.

Neither my husband nor I had active, involved parents, we were raised by the systems of the world that determined success. We went by the "list" gaining in all the right things to gain the worth that we sorely lacked growing up. I consistently strived for inclusion, for a way "in", and coupled with my co-dependency issues I ended up learning to be someone I thought everyone wanted me to be instead of learning how to be who I am made to be.

I noticed some similarities when working as a pastoral assistant at a church. I will preface this next paragraph by saying how much I loved the people I worked with and the people I served there. It's just that from behind the metaphorical veil, curtain, or what have you, it felt like human spirituality could be pared down to a list of check boxes. Because we, as a staff, would know congregants were progressing through their Christianity when we saw XYZ happening, then people started showing signs of XYZ regardless of whether any transformation had taken place. For example, generosity is a fruit of the Spirit so people would be generous because they were told being generous is good. This is different than someone



having a spiritual experience with generosity, something that cultivated a giving heart.

To me, it felt like we were trying to move congregants through a process that was God's to manage, that Christianity as a shepherding system inspired people to conform rather than transform. That is just my experience, and I had to leave the church to learn it. I know there are exceptions to the rule, but it speaks to the idea that the church discipleship process as it stands is not raising creative beings but talented imitations. If people are handed solutions that they can do for themselves as an answer to their deep spiritual questions or longing, then there is no reason to imagine with God. In fact, there is a pretty good chance they will just imbed in the system and get to work "doing spirituality".

Which, in all honesty, can still become a valid pathway to God...because like I have said before, we are creative by nature and even plants find a way to grow through paved sidewalks.

Creativity, exploration, and risking failure have been key to my transformation. I notice that if I go dark to my ability to craft my life alongside God, then my choice, basically, is to let outside people, places, systems, and things route my course and I fall into a maintenance-based lifestyle. I lose touch with my soul's desire to interplay with all life. I forget that I am always taking in information so I can in turn express my relationship with God in and through all things—high times and low times.

When my creativity suffers, so does my spirituality.  
When my spirituality suffers, so does my creativity.

NOT ONLY THAT...but, when I get wayward from my own creativity I lose sight of how to usher others through the muck and mire as well. I forget the way through. I forget to breathe, to allow, to ask, to move towards, to bear with and express. These are human movements that matter. It's not always neat and tidy, sometimes it's more like finger painting in pre-K—so just take a deep breath, grab your paint, paper and a roll of paper towels, and go for it.

Be yourself. Honor the ingredients you are made from.  
Keep becoming, beloved.

***Practice***

Search for a piece of art that speaks to you and spend time with it using the ancient practice of a Visio Divina. Afterwards, consider seeking out an artisan of your choice, find someone doing something that inspires you. Watch how they work and listen for how this informs you about the craftsmanship of your life.

## **SESSION FOUR // Crucified for All with Malcolm Guite**

*(Malcolm Guite is a priest, chaplain and teacher at the University of Cambridge. He is also a poet and singer-songwriter).*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/crucified-for-all>

### **Going Deeper**

Think about God as Creator. Spend some time describing what you have learned about the Creator of all things throughout your life's experience. Who are you in relation to the Creator? Where or how have you seen God create you and your life alongside you? Where does your inspiration come from?

Are you willing to continually be made? What do you believe is your part of the work? What do you believe is God's? How does the way you work your art lend into your belief about the way God creates?

Sometimes we use our spiritual beliefs to move out of the work of the questions to the answers, its escapism, basically. Practices—spiritual disciplines, love, boundary work, imagination, creativity, etc.—are all tools to help you work on your part. Art is a loosening tool, it helps move energy through and out of you. Developing a creative practice helps you in your work. List some ideas of practices you'd like to incorporate into your life:

*Art slows you down and commands your attention. Any form of love or gospel begins with complete attention to the other, so much attention that for a moment you forget who you are.—Malcolm Guite*

### **Reflection**

*Every single person already is art. They are already a work of art. ...Any artist who has made anything knows there is a point where you partly lose it and then you have to save it again and you have to remake it; and every artist has the temptation to give up on what it is they are making. And, if they give up on what it is they are making then they are never going to progress.—Malcolm Guite*

Malleable. Shapable. Threadable. We are in the hands of our creator from birth until death. We are continually being made. We encompass strokes of genius and gross failures. Like caterpillars, we eat life, biting leaves both bitter and sweet until

we are stuffed and ready to digest all we've taken in. We transition; with courage and willingness we surrender, assimilate, and integrate life as we knew it into our being. Like caterpillars, we are not remade into what we were, but birthed again as a new creature that still contains all of the ingredients of original one. Same but different. We emerge with stains of our past tattooed on our wings.

Unlike caterpillars and butterflies, we will do this over and over and over throughout our life because although we are "already works of art" like Guite says, we are in a state of becoming until the end...which, really, is just another beginning.

Life never stops feeding into who we are! Questions lead to answers that lead to questions, and I can attest to the fact that no answer ever sticks with me like the ones I have had to learn for myself. Life is full of questions for the seeking. Always something to learn. Art is a line of communication not just for the answers—for the triumphant, glorious end—but also for the beauty found in unlikely, ugly, seemingly unnatural places. As we grow in grace, we continue to be liberated to tell the complete story of our transition from conditional to unconditional love, from self-centeredness to one-mindedness.

The pathway to my awareness of God traversed through trauma, poverty, isolation, victimhood, survival, and depression. Nothing I was doing resembled health or happiness. By the end (or beginning) was a heap. I couldn't feel anything but numb or destitute or dirty or ill—I had no desire to feel better, I had no desire at all. I not only didn't have any of the answers, I didn't even know what questions to ask. I started taking anti-depressant medication, and during my recovery I started attending church.

The church I belonged to hummed with artists stirring up movement, laughter, and an aliveness I hadn't felt for a long time. Not long after I started attending, they had a communal art project during the Lenten season where the community was invited to write or draw a prayer or plea or whatever upon two giant canvases in lieu of taking communion.

I walked quickly past it every Sunday for weeks. On Easter Sunday, two artists stood at easels at the front of the sanctuary painting over the newly white-washed canvasses, transforming the work of the people into celebratory images portraying re-creation, new life. It was rather emotional, but as emotionally upswept as I was from the performance pieces, I knew I had not fully arrived at my own Easter Sunday.

I was not brand new. I was still miserable.  
The Easter Sunday answer wasn't really working.

I didn't understand anything beyond a moving performance. I also didn't understand then, that I hadn't made any investment in the work. I hadn't put myself out there to be shaped with everyone else. I didn't have the courage to put myself out there to be made new. I don't even know if I knew how. I was just a woman sitting in the pew waiting and wanting to not hurt anymore. I wrote this little poem then:

*tiny, tiny buds of green  
drinking up beads of dew.  
my heart waits with anticipation  
of your reveal.*

*through winters deep  
you kept your secret  
deep inside the wood.  
the exterior an ugly exoskeleton.*

*you are patient to reveal your glory.*

*i wait in excitement  
i wait in frustration  
i wait...with longing  
for the promise of rebirth.*

I really wanted to be reshaped without having to be reshaped. I wanted to be up in front of the congregation, white washed and newly painted. The process seemed harmless on Easter Sunday. But, Easter Sunday comes after Good Friday. The scourging. The breaking open and apart. The consuming nature of life. The deep need to fill a hole that may or may not have ever existed. All of the eating, friends, until I couldn't take another bite. Until I wound up sealed in a tomb of my own design having to learn to trust to dissolve. To get down to "no thing". Just me and God in a thin paper shell, and guess what? Quite simply, God tended to me and transformed me.

I want with all that I am to give you some answers, but I have found no other answer than to continue to live and take in and digest and express. To walk through mystery, trusting in becoming. Becoming for each and all of us. God designing and

redesigning over and over again. Even trees reshape over time by losing limbs and shedding leaves. We are made to be made is all I can suppose, and that making includes us doing some work to get there. We can't just have answers, it just doesn't work that way.

As impatient as I get with it, this is the creative process that I know. This is the creative process I midwife others through. Working out our salvation, together with God and one another. That is what we are doing: being crafted while grafted. Creating with Mystery. Marking and coloring our wings. Bearing colors. Communing in the process.

I know that now, and can see a beauty to what they were trying to capture in the sanctuary back then. We all must learn it is okay to still be in the work. That we don't have to have all the answers, we can be resolved to be unsolved sometimes. And, thankfully we get glimpses of our transformation along the way because though the work is hard, it's the work that gets us there.

### ***Practice***

Search for a piece of art that speaks to you and spend time with it using the Visio Divina practice. Afterwards, consider five minutes of conscious connection with God, opening to the idea that all life is continually being made. We are fully here, and yet not fully there.

## **SESSION FIVE // Creation Heals with Lanecia Rouse Tinsley**

*(Lanecia Rouse Tinsley is a creative based in Houston, TX & her work includes photography, painting, mixed media, teaching, writing & speaking).*

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/creation-heals>

### **Going Deeper**

Death comes. Our own body has cycles of death and birth that happen without us even knowing. We are constantly being created. What is your relationship with death? How have you experienced it?

Grieving is the worst kind of heartbreak and pain. Many of us try and avoid it at all costs, even to the point of trying to deny death is inevitable. How, beloved, have you grieved? How have you/do you run from death?

Were there ways, even in your grief, that you experienced life emerge from death?

Our expectations fail us. Inconceivable things happen. We have to work to stay open to be able to process what comes our way. Sometimes this comes down to simple breath work. Sometimes we need a creative modality to break open, see what we've got growing, and emerge from pain. You have considered how you express creativity throughout this curriculum. Is there anything resonating with you that is coming to the forefront? A processing tool? A creative way of expressing your humanity? What is keeping you from giving that a try?

What keeps you going?

*The fear of not doing [my art] became greater than the fear of doing it...—Lanecia Rouse Tinsley*

### **Reflection**

*I want to love the world through things that come through my hands...There was a lot of grace and relearning how to love my body...my body can create...creation is healing me.—Lanecia Rouse Ainsley*

A year ago a 15 year old girl was referred to me, let's call her Jane. A friend of mine met her in the hospital after Jane had been suicidal, had started cutting herself, and also ran away from home. He thought we'd be good for one another. Her grandmother called me and we set up a meeting at my office for spiritual direction. Not knowing where she was going, Jane fell asleep in the car on the way over, so I opened the door to a very sleepy and confused young lady.

We spent the hour with me asking a million questions trying to find a way in, and her shrugging, shaking her head yes or no, or making small sentences letting me know the wall she had constructed to protect herself was well established and hard to penetrate.

I spun a 360 in my chair while asking if she liked to draw or write or anything like that. She nodded. Inspired by the connection, I said, "me too!" I asked her what her dreams were like at night, and she immediately told me she kept a dream journal by her bed. Intriguing! I was all lit up now.

I let her know that IF she ever wanted to share something she drew or wrote with another person who was willing to look and listen, I would be more than honored. I showed her some of the art I had made that I keep in my office, and let her know that should she want to, we could work on a project together. Time was up, and her grandmother was at the door. We made an appointment for the following week.

I was watching out my office window the next week as Jane arrived. She opened the car door and had a journal in her hands, my heart skipped a beat. She came straight up to my office eager to read her work to me. We sat down on my couch together and she read me poetry, and dream narratives, and showed me her doodles and sketches, defining what they meant to her and what inspired them.

I spent that whole hour stunned and amazed. I held back tears until she left, she reminded me so much of myself. It was surreal.

We have been meeting for a while now, and my heart has only grown. Over the summer I asked her to make a timeline of her life, not just the bad things, but all the meaningful things. Whatever she remembered, put it on there. She brought it in a few weeks ago and we looked at it together. I asked her what was standing out to her on that day, and we used that inspiration to create a visual with whatever materials she chose. When we were done, we talked about all the feelings, the points of impact during our creating, and the ability to see herself in that time from



a more mature perspective. She touched the image of little Jane on the sketch pad as she considered the idea that this suffering little girl was somehow lovable.

We looked at the colors she chose and why.  
We looked at the shadows and the light.  
We found hope and love where we least expected it.

I wept after she left, friends.

I know it seems trivial during death times to say “have you tried making some art?” but I ask it of people because once upon a time in a hell of my own, I had to try something besides nothing. I didn’t know God was there the way God is always there. I needed another way to find out. I needed another line of sight.

Of course creating doesn’t erase devastations like Tinsley or Jane or I and likely you have experienced. What it does is give us some holy ground to work through and work out what we need to work through and work out while also giving us a medium to touch one another’s humanity.

Creating is movement.  
Creating brings fresh air.  
Creating brings the option of perspective.  
Creating heals.

Again, whatever the medium, whatever the modality, healing creation is communion.

One of the artistic processes Lancia Rouse Tinsley uses and teaches is called Kintsugi or Kintsukuroi. According to one of Tinsley’s Instagram posts, Kintsugi “is a Japanese method rooted in wabi-wabi philosophy for repairing broken ceramics with a special lacquer mixed with gold. The philosophy behind the technique is to recognize the history of the object and to visibly incorporate the repair into the new piece instead of disguising it. The process usually gives way to something more beautiful than what was.”

Kintsugi—using a precious material to reassemble a shattered body of work—is a beautiful metaphor for how God rebuilds us after tragedy. It reminds me that I, myself, don’t hold who I am together on my own. Something greater is present. This is true individually as well as communally. God holds us all together in layers of ways.

Which, honestly, is the beauty through it all.

***Practice***

Search for a piece of art that speaks to you and spend time with it using the Visio Divina practice. Afterwards, consider five minutes of conscious connection with God offering up a new willingness to let your grievances pass through you. Feel out what practice might be emerging for you. Ask for the courage to act.

## ***Final thoughts...***

*What does art have to do with salvation?*

Throughout the writing of this curriculum I have had a creative block. It was solid. I couldn't find a way around it, so I just had to wait it out. It was pretty frustrating. But, stare at the computer as I might, nothing would come. So, I had to try and find a way back to the flow. I started creating space. Just a little room each day for my mind to relax and my thoughts to separate.

Sitting in the sun for 15 minutes in the afternoon.  
Taking a 2.5 mile walk in the late night air.  
Yoga on mornings I could manage it.

I needed to make room in my life for God and for my human journey to work its way forward.

I don't know if I have ever mentioned this in any of the curricula I have been blessed to be part of, but I would much rather be the kind of pastor who is well versed enough that she can write just about anything off the top of her head. The kind who is ever so forthright in telling others what to do.

Unfortunately, I am not her.

My call to ordination did not lead me through a pulpit, but a pasture. Along the way, I have really stepped in it, but that has not deterred me...in fact, if you ask my closest friends they will let you know I have quite a rebellious streak. Sadly, I am even known to rebel against the things that are best for me, including my own mindfulness to my humanity.

Working through this series has helped me remember a part of myself that I have let become stagnant. It also reminded me how much my spirit depends on me making room for craft. I can't not create. It is what reminds me that God is with me, always. My work is to be willing to let go and bend and move and find the flow when I get too choked up. My work is to remember that I forget and get "too busy", even if my too busy is by offering my service to others.

I like to think that as much as I love creating space and time and art with Spirit, Spirit loves being together back. I don't know if that is how Spirit works, but I like

to think so. I like to think that God's willingness to hold me together as a being is some sort of proof that God likes being with me.

I think God likes being with each and every one of us, regardless of our awareness because God is holding each and every one of us together. And, as much as I LOVE to perpetuate a romance with God alone, I can't because even more than creating with God alone, I ADORE creating with God and others. I want to be part of humanity's healing, the story of all of us. The hum that is growing across the globe and out into the universe that continues to say we are all included, we are all together in this.

Art, both my own and that of others, reveals waves of inspiration of love and healing, and I not only crave and want it, I need it. I need you to remind me when I forget that opening up is the path I choose. Opening up to the possibility of God in everything means I get to seek the beauty in everything.

In  
Every  
Person,  
Place,  
Situation,  
Thing.

And, I can only do that if I am willing to put myself out there and let God lead me towards something greater than myself. To the place where what is true for one is true for all. To salvation.

Let's create our way through, friends, there is beauty in it. God is doing God's part, and I will be doing mine right alongside you.

- Kelly Ann Hall