

God as Artist



SABBATH—MARCH 10

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 64:5–8; Psalm 51:10; Hebrews 8:1–5; 1 Chronicles 23:5; Romans 11:33–36; Acts 9:1–22.

MEMORY VERSE: “I’m [I am] asking the Lord for only one thing. Here is what I want. I want to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. I want to look at the beauty of the Lord” (Psalm 27:4, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: God as Artist? What does that mean? And what does it mean for us?

SO FAR, WE HAVE LOOKED AT DIFFERENT SIDES OF THE LORD: the Three-in-Oneness of God, God’s holiness, and God as Savior. There is also another side to God in the Bible. But people do not pay much attention to it. This is the artist side of God.

Many people claim they have no interest in the arts, such as painting, dance, or writing. Many Christians know little about the arts. They may know what they like. But that is nothing more than knowledge about themselves. Some admit that there are arts, although the arts do not interest them. But they never give a thought to how important the arts are in the lives of others.

Christianity has often been unclear about the arts. At times, the arts have been said to be irreligious and evil. At other times the beauty of the arts has become a worldly “religion” with those who are serious fans of art. There are also plenty of Christian writers, but they have seldom tried to connect the idea of “beauty” with the important Christian doctrines (beliefs).

However, “beauty is truth, truth beauty,” wrote English poet John Keats. And God is Truth, and the Truth is beautiful. So, creation itself gives testimony to the fact that God is an Artist and a Lover of what is beautiful.

SUNDAY—MARCH 11**GOD AS POTTER¹ (Isaiah 64:8)**

According to Genesis 1:26, 27, 31 and Genesis 2:7, when is the first time that the Bible shows God using His skills as a potter working to make people out of clay?

The Bible opens with God creating the first humans out of the “dust of the ground.” The Hebrew word for “man,” *adam*, is closely tied to the Hebrew word for “ground.” The Hebrew word for “ground” is *adamah*—a connection that shows the wonderful truth about God’s skill as a “potter.” He truly formed us out of the clay of the ground. It is hard to imagine how a human being, with our blood and bones and skin and nerves, could have been created from the ground. Our life is a miracle that is far beyond human understanding.

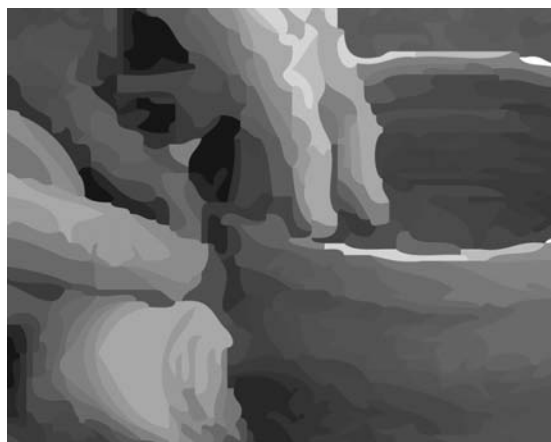
The “potter” image (word-picture) means that the Lord used clay to form us. But the image does not give a true picture of God’s power as Artist. After all, no human potter can take clay and turn it into a living, breathing thing.

How is the symbol of God as Potter used in Jeremiah 18:3–10 and Isaiah 64:5–8?

The main idea in these verses is to show how helpless we are before the power of God. We are, in a way, like clay in the hands of a potter. The potter, not the clay, is in charge.

At the same time, God is working to re-create (create again) His image (likeness) in us. God cares much about His physical creation. But He cares much more about the beauty of what He can do in us. We are to surrender, to die to self, and to cooperate with the Lord. He wants to re-create and give back to us the original, spiritual, and moral (righteous) beauty that we had at Eden before the Fall. Sure, appearances can be beautiful, but inner beauty is what really is important.

Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky created an imaginary character who had a “beautiful soul.” What is your idea of a “beautiful soul”? What things in you do not match or equal that ideal (perfect model)?



God the Potter is working to re-create His image in us.

MONDAY—MARCH 12**GOD AS ARCHITECT
(Exodus 25:1–9)**

1. potter—a person who molds clay into pottery (pots, plates, vases, etc.).

Through a miracle, God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt. Then He brought His people to Mount Sinai. There, He joined them to Himself in a sacred covenant (promise). Among all the different instructions He gave them there, how was beauty included, according to Exodus 25:1–9?

The first half of the book of Exodus explains the miraculous rescue of Israel from Egypt. The second half of the book deals with beauty. God's instructions of Exodus 25:1–9 are followed by Exodus 25:10–31:11, with God's "blueprints" for the tent sanctuary (place of worship), its furniture, and the priestly clothes. From Exodus 35:1 to the end of the book (Exodus 40:38), we find God's descriptions of how the project of building the sanctuary is done. This record includes many details of beautiful artwork.

This collection of details is boring reading to many modern Christians. But it pleased God to give these many instructions to the newly freed slaves and to include the instructions in the Bible.

There are almost fifty chapters in the first five books of the Bible that give a record of God's careful instructions for a beautiful sanctuary. In these chapters, He gives the detailed blueprints for the sanctuary and the exact directions for the furniture. It is important to know, for example, that on Mount Sinai God not only gave the Ten Commandments with instructions for obeying Him. But He also gave careful directions about how to build and decorate a beautiful

sanctuary, showing His great artistic skill.

God was Architect of it all. Everything was planned by God, even the smallest details. Nothing was of human design. There are more chapters about the plans for the building of this sanctuary than for any other subject in the first five books of Moses.

The earthly sanctuary was a model for what, according to Hebrews 8:1–5? (Read also Exodus 25:9.) And what does that tell us about God's love of beauty?

The earthly sanctuary was just a "shadow" of the heavenly sanctuary. But we cannot begin to imagine how beautiful the real sanctuary in heaven must be. It is the one that God Himself made.

Why do you think it was important for the sanctuary to be so beautiful? Perhaps to give the people a sense of deep respect for the power and glory (beauty and perfection) of God. Maybe to help them to sense their own need before such glory. How can the glory of the sanctuary help us to better understand the character of God (who God is), as compared² to our lowly condition in this sinful world?

TUESDAY—MARCH 13

GOD AS MUSICIAN (1 Chronicles 23:5)

“ ‘Another 4,000 will guard the

2. compared—to show how two or more things are different.

gates. And 4,000 will praise the Lord with the instruments of music I've [I have] provided for that purpose' ” (1 Chronicles 23:5, NIV).

Try to picture in your mind the scene above. Four thousand people playing musical instruments in praise of the Lord! That must have been a beautiful worship service.

God's artistic ability is not limited to the arts. In the Bible we find that, along with the sanctuary, Israel's worship services were inspired by the Lord. This means that God is a Lover of beautiful music too.

According to 2 Samuel 23:1, 2, what does King David say is the source of the psalms that Israel used in worship?

David was clear that he was inspired by the Lord to write the songs that he did. This does not mean that the Lord wrote the words and music for him. But it does mean that the Lord cared about the kind of music that was played. If not, why would He bother to inspire it?

What does 2 Chronicles 29:25 tell us about the Lord's part in the music that was played in Israel's worship services?

Throughout the Old Testament, music is an important part of the temple worship service. For example, picture again the worship atmosphere in the descriptions in 1 Chronicles 23:5. Four thousand instruments! It certainly was not boring or dry!

It might be argued that beautiful art and music could be expected in all kinds of worship services throughout history. But Israel alone claims that God Himself designed every part of His worship, including buildings, furniture, priestly robes, and services. There can be no doubt that artistic design is approved of (accepted) in the Bible. Anyone who claims that art is not an important part of churches and worship services goes against the record of the Bible. And to say that art is not honorable work for a Christian is to go against the Bible too.

We do not have the music that was used in Israelite worship. But it must have been beautiful, and it certainly must have lifted the people's souls toward the Lord. How does music in our church work today? How can we be sure that it lifts our souls toward the Lord instead of pushing us in another direction?



God is a Lover of beautiful music.

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 14

**GOD AS AUTHOR
(Romans 11:33–36)**

Bible thinkers have often been impressed by the beautiful writing of the Bible itself. In fact, many worldly colleges teach courses on the Bible as literature.³ These college professors and students do not study the Bible because they think it is the Word of God. Instead, they study it simply for the beauty of its writing style.

As Christians, we have the blessing of both enjoying the beauty of the writing of the Bible and learning the truths about God as shown in the Bible. No doubt, too, the beautiful writing of the stories and the poetry, with the Holy Spirit's leading, helps us a lot in our understanding of the truths in the Bible.

For example, the apostle (teacher) Paul often uses beautiful writing to explain deep Bible truths. In the first eleven chapters of the book of Romans, for example, Paul gives a complete story of the gospel. Read through these chapters and notice the different topics that Paul puts together.

What is happening in Romans 11:33–36 because of that which came before it?

Paul first takes in the wide view of salvation history, and then he bursts into praise. In other words, before Paul goes on to list the helpful instructions of the gospel, he worships.

Paul uses this same technique (writing plan) several times in his letters. He weaves together deep religious reasons with praise to God before closing with useful pieces of advice.

The book of Revelation also is

filled with beautiful writing about the big picture. Through it God discusses salvation history. Much of the book is taken from the Old Testament. But in Revelation the reader is given a “hand-woven” picture of words, phrases, and themes borrowed from other biblical writers but now woven together into an entirely new “cloth.” This final book in the Bible is in a style very different from what Paul and the Gospel writers used. Instead, we are given a very beautiful and deep picture of seven carefully planned scenes of the heavenly sanctuary. Each scene leads us more deeply into the heavenly court.

The book of Revelation is a very beautiful pictorial (containing pictures) show. God could have instructed John to write a standard historical document to explain the salvation story. Instead, we see an amazing (wonderful) picture of the great controversy (war) between Christ and Satan. It is a more detailed picture of the end-time picture given earlier to Daniel and Ezekiel.



Paul used beautiful writing to explain deep truths.

3. literature—the quality of writings in books.

Imagine college students reading the Bible only as literature. Talk about their missing the point! What lessons can we learn from this about how easily we can have truth right before our eyes and yet miss it completely?

THURSDAY—MARCH 15

GOD AS A SCULPTOR (CARVER) (Luke 22:31, 32)

God is also a Sculptor, but not one limited to granite or marble. Instead, He sculpts (carves) our characters (who we are). He can take a sinful human person and shape and chisel and hammer away until that person shows something of heaven's glory (great beauty). God has given much evidence of His powerful skills to do this. From cover to cover in Scripture, we find God taking persons we might think of as unattractive and unworthy (not deserving) and making them into something beautiful.

Who are some characters in the Bible who needed a bit of spiritual carving? What needed changes were made in their lives? For example, Jacob (Genesis 32:22–30); David (Psalm 51); Peter (Luke 22:31, 32); and Paul (Acts 9:1–22). Whom else can you think of, and what kind of changes came about in them?

Another good example is Mary Magdalene. “Mary had been . . . a great sinner, but Christ knew the conditions [situations] that had controlled her

life. . . . It was Jesus who had lifted her from despair and ruin. Seven times Mary had heard His rebuke [scolding] of the demons that controlled her heart and mind. She had heard His strong cries to the Father for her sake. She knew how terrible sin is to Jesus. And in His strength she had won the battle against sin. . . . [This woman] who had fallen, and whose mind had been a home of demons, was brought very near to the Savior in fellowship and ministry [work done for God]. . . . Mary stood beside the Cross. . . . Mary was first at the tomb after Jesus' resurrection (return to life). It was Mary who first announced to the people a risen Savior.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 568.

Salvation history is full of God's creative work in restoring (bringing back) in fallen men and women the lost image of God. The gospel is a life-changing experience that cleanses, shapes, and beautifies us with its power. The gospel of Jesus Christ creatively builds with purity and wholeness. True newness takes place inside a person. It is God's work to create and restore beauty to a fallen (ruined), sinful life.



God takes persons who are unworthy and makes them into something beautiful.

Sculpting involves chiseling, filing, and maybe even the breaking off of parts. What areas in your life need to be sculpted a bit more? How much do you fight against this often difficult change in your life?

FRIDAY—MARCH 16

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Let the life-changing power of God be felt in the heart of a person. Then we shall see the deep moving of the Spirit of God. Forgiveness of sin is not the only result of the death of Jesus. He made the great sacrifice so that sin might be removed and that souls might be rebuilt from its ruins, and made fit for the presence of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, volume 6, page 11.

“How hard the artist works to put on canvas a perfect likeness of his model. How carefully the sculptor carves and chisels out the stone into a likeness of the copy he is following. So the parents should labor to shape and polish their children after the example given them in Christ Jesus. The patient artist studies, works, and plans to make the results of his labors more perfect. In the same way, the parent should spend time in training the children for useful lives and for getting them ready for the eternal kingdom. The artist’s work is small and unimportant compared with that of the parent. The artist deals with lifeless material, from which he makes forms of beauty. But the parent deals with a child whose life can be shaped for good or ill. The child can be raised to bless or to curse them [his or her

parents]. The child can go out in darkness or to live forever in a future sinless world.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, pages 476, 477.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What opportunity have you had to develop and use any artistic skills? When you have created something of beauty, how have you remembered to create it so that you showed the “image of God”? To put it another way, how are you in your own way showing the creative power of the Lord when you are creative?
- ② Look around at the created world, at nature, even after it has been so long spoiled by sin. In what ways does nature still powerfully show the creative power of God and His artistic mastery and love of beauty? What things in nature do you find truly beautiful, and why?
- ③ As we said in the introduction, Christians have always had some mixed feelings about the arts. Why would that be? What are some of the negative things about art? At the same time, how can we use our own artistic gifts to show God’s glory and His kingdom?

SUMMARY: God’s skills as an Artist have been overlooked. People enjoy His created world. But His artistic skills show His great abilities much more. God designs (plans) that Christians be examples of beauty in a dark and dying planet.