

WORK

as worship



Nobody tells this to people who are beginners, I wish someone had told me. All of us who do creative work, we get into it because we have good taste. But there is this gap. For the first couple years you make stuff, it's just not that good. It's trying to be good, it has potential, but it's not. But your taste, the thing that got you into the game, is still killer. And your taste is why your work disappoints you. A lot of people never get past this phase, they quit. Most people I know who do interesting, creative work went through years of this. We know our work doesn't have this special thing that we want it to have. We all go through this. And if you are just starting out or you are still in this phase, you gotta know it's normal and the most important thing you can do is do a lot of work. Put yourself on a deadline so that every week you will finish one story. It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions . . . It's normal to take awhile. You've just gotta fight your way through.

—Ira Glass, *This American Life*

I first fell in love with the word “vocation” some three years ago—nine months after leaving my publicist job to pursue a career in music. For me, music had become more than just a hobby and even less a job. It was a calling. Most people thought I was crazy. They believed I had potential but that I was foolish and maybe too hopeful. No one blatantly voiced their concern, but I could see it in their eyes and their roundabout questions:

“You quit your day job?”

“Yes.”

“This is *all* you’re doing?”

“Yes.”

“So do you still live with your parents?”

“No.”

Not that there’s anything wrong with that. Parents are great. And when I launched out on this new career I expected things to be hard, but I also expected to be happier. I took a major pay cut, making less than thirty percent of my salary from my previous job while working twice as hard with twice as many hours.

Work, I’ve learned, is an act of worship. As a child raised in a devout Christian home, I regarded worship as an act of submission and praise; but my understanding had always been limited to music, the lifting of hands, and, coming from a Nigerian background, dancing. As I ventured into the unknown territory of self-employment, I began to notice how the Word of God beautifully illustrates the posture we are to take towards our work. Genesis, after all, begins with an introduction to work . . . and yes, creativity. Not a coincidence.

THE SEED

Do your planning and prepare your fields before building your house.

—Proverbs 24:27 (NLT)

In the New Testament, Jesus shares a parable about a farmer and his sown seeds—some sown on shallow, rocky soil, some on a treaded path, falling victim to the birds, some sown among thorns, and others sown on fertile soil. As the story goes, each seed eventually dies except the ones sown on good ground.

As music makers, we often spend so much time thinking about the product that we forget the process. During my years as a publicist, I learned that most authors think their work is finished when the book is finished. And unfortunately, most musicians think the same way. But the work has barely begun! Let’s say you’ve just spent one month in the studio, one month mixing/mastering your project, and one month putting together your album artwork. Two weeks ago you sent everything to the printer, and now you have 1,000 units of your album sitting in your living room and several thousand dollars “missing” from your bank account! Does this sound familiar?

Here’s the thing: you can’t just write a song and put it out there, because no one will hear it. And by “no one” I mean no people outside of your immediate family and friends. You need a game plan, a marketing plan that adds fuel to the fire. There’s nothing like putting your heart and soul into a project, completing the project, and discovering that it’s just sitting there, waiting for someone to care. Nobody wants that. So what is your fertile soil? Is it a network of support that you have spent months creating? Is it the research you have done to guide you in your

new venture? Have you connected with others who are on a similar journey and who can mentor you? And most importantly, do you believe in your vision enough to make others believe in it? You can build a house, but if you build it on sand, it will eventually fall over. It might be great for a day, a month, or even year, but it will eventually fall. The foundation, the preparation, the seed is more important than you or I will ever know.

THE WATER

Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.”

—Colossians 3:23 (NLT)

I am convinced that true, lasting work rarely ever sees immediate return—that true work involves preparing the ground, planting the seed, and watering. . . then watering some more. . . and then pruning. . . and then continued watering. The problem with this is that, in a culture where we’ve become accustomed to getting what we want, when we want it, and how we want it, working for anything just doesn’t seem fair, especially if we’re not getting paid immediately. How tragic to think that we are cheating ourselves from true success because of our selfishness and impatience.

Nestled in between a verse on pride and a verse on hope is the following: “Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears; wealth from hard work grows over time.” —Proverbs 13:11 (NLT). I don’t see this placement as sheer coincidence. In fact, these words carry even more weight in context. For many of us working musicians, trust for provision is a constant struggle that requires humbling and hoping (or confidently believing) that we will see the fruit of our labor. So in a perfect world, we are to be diligent knowing that we labor not in vain, but instead with an expectant heart that trusts in God for a full return of our investment—one that will grow over time.

“So, why aren’t my albums selling? Why can’t I get a good gig? Why don’t I get any traffic on my website?” Well, how much time do you actually *invest* in your art? Just like any career, your art requires time, money, and patience. “Big breaks” are a thing of the past, and really a negative by-product of the fast-food world we live in. As we work to perfect, produce, and present our work, we are called by the Scriptures to work as if we are working for the Lord—the boss of all bosses, and the ultimate investor. Invest in your work as if you have been commissioned by the Lord himself. With that in mind, remember these three things: