



THE GOSPEL *in the Green Room*

Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God fully accomplishes salvation for us, rescuing us from judgment for sin into fellowship with him, and then restores the creation in which we can enjoy our new life together with him forever.

—Tim Keller

“Rob, you’re a Christian, what do you think?”

I had been “prayerfully eavesdropping”—taking longer than necessary to gather my papers after class just so I could hear this argument play out. Two of my college students were at odds about God’s feelings toward homosexuality. The Catholic student (let’s call him Joe) played the “abomination” card way too early in the conversation for this to end well. Sam (I will be assigning pseudonyms to most people in this essay for obvious reasons) had recently been experimenting with a homosexual lifestyle. He had also experimented with living and working on an Amish farm for a season—a true “seeker” if ever there was one.

It was out of sheer exasperation that he turned to me to ask the question.

“Rob, you’re a Christian, what do you think?”

“Well, Sam, here’s what I know for sure . . .”

The next words out of my mouth were a token of grace from the Holy Spirit, and would be repeated often by me over the years.

“... whether you’re gay or straight, God loved you so much that He sent His one and only Son to die for you. And, if you believe in Him, you will not perish but will have everlasting life.”

Time stood still in the lecture hall. It was as if all the foul air of their dead-end conversation had been sucked out of the room and replaced by something . . . uncomfortable. I stayed quiet—determined not to be the next one to speak.

Sam broke the silence.

“Do you have time to talk?”

“How about now?” I replied.

We walked to the student union together. Sam grilled me for several hours about my faith. Eventually, he decided that he was done experimenting—he was ready to commit his life to Christ. I had the privilege of discipling Sam over the next several months and can say with certainty that I gained a brother that day.

MY CALLING

My own faith journey also began when I was in college. And, just like Sam, it was a music professor who led me to Christ—Dr. Bob Gower (his real name), my music theory professor at the University of Miami.

I was a talented performer and a budding young conductor at the time. But even after I became a Christian I struggled to find direction in my life and ministry. It seemed that every pastor in every church I attended tried to convince me that the best way I could serve God was to be a minister of music. However, that just didn't feel right to me—I certainly didn't feel “called” to the pastorate (whatever that means). It wasn't until I read Bob Briner's seminal book, *Roaring Lambs: A Gentle Plan to Radically Change Your World*, that I began to understand who I was in God's kingdom.

Briner was an Emmy Award-winning television producer. A graduate of a small Christian college, he told of feeling frustrated as his classmates who were going into the pastorate or professional missions were being prayed over and “sent” while he was being told, “Well, I hope you don't lose your faith” because he had ambitions to work in television. In *Roaring Lambs*, Briner encourages the church to see the performing arts as a mission field rather than something to be feared and avoided. And to see our talented young people as potential missionaries to be invested in, prayed over, and sent, rather than misfits who should be redirected or shunned because of their talents and desires.

My life's work began to take shape. By the time I read *Roaring Lambs* I was already in my late twenties and a college professor. But now I began to understand who I was in the Kingdom, and I started to frame my ministry with this in mind. Here is what I was to be:

1. Missionary to other performing artists
2. Mentor and teacher to young artists
3. Advocate for talented Christians who desire careers in the arts

I want to reiterate that this was what I was sensing (and observing) that God wanted me to pursue. This is certainly not a ministry checklist for everyone who reads this essay, but I hope it will give everyone hope who is wrestling with what they need to be about. Also, please note that this is not a “mission statement” for my life. I believe that once we are saved we all have the same mission: *to be available and obedient to Christ.*

YOUR CALLING

If we are honest about our talents, gifts, and desires, then our assignments from God will become clear . . . and will usually make sense (at least in retrospect). But we must be honest with ourselves and invite honest feedback. The only reason I am able to do what I do in the performing arts mission field is because I am talented. That’s right, you heard me. I’m a talented performer. And it would be false modesty to say otherwise. Retired NBA star Shaquille O’Neal is just over seven feet tall. That’s *really* tall. He would be lying, or displaying some sort of warped sense of false humility, if he said otherwise. It is abundantly clear that a good deal of Shaq’s success as a basketball player was because of his enormous height. Part of his decision to play basketball professionally was based upon his height.

You might ask, “Well, how will I know if I have the talent to work in the performing arts?” I will ask you in return, “How did Shaq know he was tall?” The answer, of course, is that he had confirmation of his height. The gradually ascending pencil lines on his mom’s door frame proved it. And, as he looked around, he was eventually looking at the tops of everyone else’s heads. Where will you find confirmation of your talent?

In Proverbs 11:14 God’s word tells us: “Where there is no guidance, the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.” Yep, ask a lot of experts what they think. Do you suspect that you have the potential to be a great actor? Take *a lot* of auditions. And listen carefully to the panels’ feedback. Think that you’re a talented singer or dancer? Ask for brutal honesty and you’ll get it. Which leads me to the next Scripture, Proverbs 12:15: “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.”

Do you *really* want to know if you have what it takes? Because if not, you are a fool. This proverb indicates that there are those who will seek counsel but choose to ignore it because they have deluded themselves into thinking that they are more talented than they are. Early in my career, I taught a voice class at a community college in Seattle. I will never forget one student (let’s call her Jean) who was in my class to prepare for her career as a singer/songwriter. The thing is, she had very little—almost zero—talent in either field. I absolutely hate when people throw away their money to train in an area where they have no chance to succeed. So, halfway through the quarter, I decided that Jean needed to hear the truth. She was not a particularly kind person (and she was about a decade older than me), so I had to muster