

# The Art of the Story

By Tony Guerrero

**G**od loves creativity. All you have to do is open the Bible to page one, and you see the ultimate Creator at work. I truly believe this creative drive is reflected in us; God instilled in each of us some form of creativity, whether it is in the arts, construction, decorating, business, even daydreaming.

For centuries, the Church was a major patron of the creative arts. In fact, chances are many of the great classical themes you recognize from composers like Bach or Mozart were commissioned by the Church. These days, it's pretty rare that a church commissions or even places much importance on works like this. In fact, churches with strong creative arts programs tend to be the exception rather than the rule. The modern church has become a very "speaker-oriented" culture where the worship service tends to center around the spoken message. My point here is not to argue that this is somehow wrong; the spoken message is obviously crucial. But we also live in a bit of an enigma. In a recent article in *Worship Leader* magazine Chris Tomlin points out, "People learn theology through songs even more than sermons,"<sup>1</sup> As a person who happens to agree with this, at least to some degree, I think it is a mistake when we overlook, or diminish, the importance of the arts. (If you disagree with Chris' point, compare how many 16-year old kids are quoting Charles Spurgeon to how many know all of David Crowder's songs.)

## THE POWER OF SEARCHING

Today's church is often missing an important and effective tool in delivering the gospel message—one employed often by Jesus Himself. This tool is basically a method of causing the learner to think through to an answer or conclusion on his or her own. And there is a psychological aspect to this as well. When you tell someone a truth in terms that make it black or white, they are then free to choose to believe you or not. However, when we lead a listener, helping them to reach a conclusion on their own by letting them think through the process, the truth becomes theirs. I was taught that when you compare modern day Western culture to ancient Jewish culture you'll see this difference clearly—modern day Western culture demands black-and-white answers while ancient Jewish culture often answered questions by asking another question or by offering a story designed to make the questioner think to find the answer.

## A PERFECT MESSAGE

Jesus did this often, and the Bible is rich with parables because of it. He could have easily taught or answered his disciples



by simply saying, "This is the way it is..." and presented some objective truth. But He often chose to tell stories instead. These stories have lasted through the ages as powerful tools for teaching God's truths, and they have withstood centuries of scrutiny and criticism. And we have non-biblical examples as well that show how powerful a story can be in teaching a truth, think of the tortoise and the hare or the boy who cried wolf.

The arts have the ability to teach in this way. And when I say the arts, I'm not just talking about your music program; the arts encompass many elements—music, drama, dance, writing, visual arts, film/video arts, graphic arts, and so on. In many ways, these various disciplines all fall under the term storytelling. We use music, dance, drama, and so on to tell a story in a unique way, one that will capture the attention of a congregant or drive a point home in a way that the spoken word can't. There are countless stories of people who, even after years of listening to sermons, were finally moved to faith by the power of a song. Or people called to action because of a powerful moment in a movie or book.

## A NEW SKILL

It is a necessary skill in our culture (and, I imagine, in ancient Jewish culture) that in order to be an effective teacher or speaker, one must also be a capable storyteller. Likewise, any artist who wishes to communicate with their audience must also learn to tell a story through the notes they play, the songs they sing, the paintings they paint. How much better would the Kingdom be served when these two forces—the storytelling teacher and the storytelling artist—are united in their efforts?

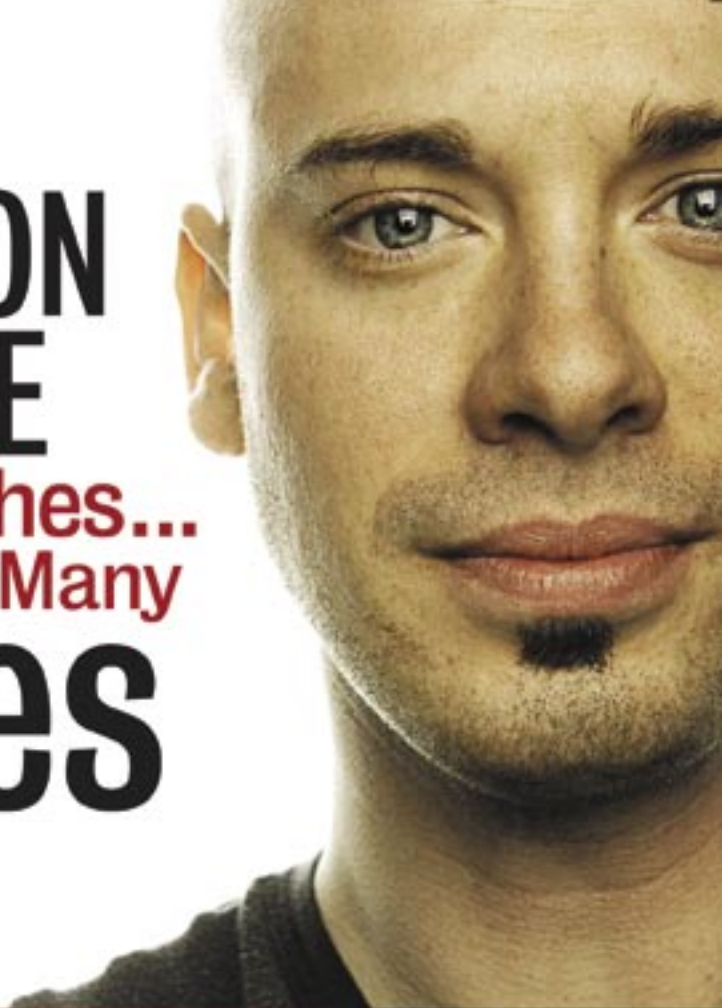
You may not be in a position to turn your church into a great patron of the arts, but you can continue to develop your skills—both your technical proficiency and your storytelling skills—to the best of your ability, and then trust that your efforts, if dedicated to the Lord, will not return void. God will use your art for His glory—if not at church, certainly somewhere—if you give it to Him.

*1 Chris Tomlin, Worship Leader magazine, SongSeeker supplement, July 2004*

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*Tony Guerrero is the Director of Creative Arts at Saddleback Church. He is also a recognized jazz trumpeter and is finishing up his latest CD featuring several jazz notables. Visit [tonyguerrero.com](http://tonyguerrero.com) for more information.*

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