



In Your Spare Time

by Andy Raine

The apostle Paul worked almost all the time, making tents. In fact, he delighted in not being a financial burden even to the churches he had raised up himself. He planted churches, developed relationships, taught and encouraged and interceded all in his spare time.

I draw attention to this, not to make us feel defeated and unproductive in comparison, but to encourage us to offer to God again the availability we do have. For most of us, dance is necessarily a spare-time activity. We are too busy working, earning a living, supporting a family or studying for a qualification...

Even those released for ministry full-time may only have to opportunity to spend a small proportion of their time and energies to developing their gifts in the dance. It may come in 'seasons', when there is 'a time to dance' or the occasional project or opportunity which challenges and stretches us. There is nothing unusual or untoward about this.

In terms of creativity, the occasional evening given over to free-dance with new music, or revision of old materials, is enough to remind us what it is all about, especially if we are able to give time just being in God's presence along, conscious only of Him.

Often you hit up against a profound *dissatisfaction* with your own dancing. This may be because your dancing once seemed vibrant and alive, 'on the cutting edge' of what God was doing and not it seems stale and predictable. Your body just doesn't seem capable of doing what you want it to anymore. Maybe you are carrying extra weight or haven't exercised for ages...

Another dissatisfaction can sound like this: 'All our dance is irrelevant and stilted. It lacks power and imagination: 'There has to be more than this?'

Dissatisfaction can be the 'goad', the provocation to cause us to want better, to create material with more originality. Often, something has to be recognised by the heart. Things that are deep, heart-felt and painful need new language to be conveyed and expressed. We can determine not to be superficial in our treatment of serious subjects, and more courageous in engaging with difficult concerns and issues.

Jim Wallis, of the Sojourners Fellowship in Washington DC, once challenged his audience to ask, 'Where are the songs I could sing in jail?' Some of the best suggestions were old Negro spirituals such as 'Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, nobody knows but Jesus', or protest songs like 'How can I keep from singing?' Some of Paul's letters were also written from jail. Years before, this same Paul learned to sing psalms at midnight, even after a brutal beating.

Within the confines of our own circumstances we can learn to offer a sacrifice of praise. Against the background of our own contemporary culture, we can find authentic ways to express the things that matter to us. People like us readily resonate with our struggles even if we are quick to dismiss platitudes or easy answers.

The priority is to get real, and give much energy to expressing our struggle and hope.

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