

I was about twelve when a movie convinced me that the devil and witches were real and that they were dark and evil. Through many years of mystical searching I remained repulsed by overt darkness. I wanted light! Years later I heard Simon and Garfunkel sing, *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. I remember it clearly. As I listened I cried... and cried. I thought, *That's what true love is like. Sacrificing. Unconditional. I want that kind of love!*

Several years later, two movies presented Jesus in a way that made Him culturally relevant to me. As imperfect as they were, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* bypassed my walls, softened my heart, and made me willing to go to my first Bible study. That's where I heard the Word for the very first time. I gave my life to Jesus one week later.

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I had channel-surfed past TV preachers for years, never relating to their three-piece suits or their message. But God used the media to plant spiritual seeds He could grow and later harvest. Today there are millions like I was, lost in darkness and just waiting for the truth to be presented in a "language" they can receive.

I believe the keys to reaching multitudes with modern-day parables are locked within the hearts of our contemporary artists. Let's encourage them to cut loose and go for it. And the next time we hear about a Christian artist wanting to "crossover" into the world's marketplace to plant or water, let's rejoice and remember just how much "the cross" is needed "over" there.

Trailblazing Media Arts

A friend of mine just moved to Hollywood. She'd had a corporate job overseeing a 64 million-dollar yearly budget, with 200 people under her. But she's also a fine actress and feels called as an ambassador to the arts. She doesn't care about being a star, she just wants to use her acting gift. She also wants to be "salt" to those she works with, and do silent intercession for the whole industry while she's on the sets. A director asked her, "How can you be an actress with integrity if there are roles you'd refuse because of your faith?" She said, "If I accept a role then refuse to perform it, I'd lack integrity. But if I reject a role because of its contents, then I'm operating in full integrity regarding my faith and my craft."

There may not be a lot of easy answers for artists bold enough

to venture beyond the church. And like all of us, they'll stand accountable to God for how they used, or buried, their talent. The fact is, many of our artists are called to "plant and water" among the lost. We need to stop pressuring them to conform their art to fit standard "pulpit" giftings. Perhaps it's their audience, not their art, that God wants to change.

Why not publicly anoint our artists, affirm their giftings, and commission them to their mission field? The whole church could even promise their support and prayers while they're out there blazing a trail for others to follow. If we did this, maybe, just maybe, the Holy Spirit will inspire a few of them to present God's power and love in ways that are so relevant, bold, and innovative that people around the world will be shaken with the reality of Jesus the giver of every good gift.

And if one of these young artists happens to ask us for advice, we need to take a deep breath and be sure we don't discourage a God-inspired idea, no matter how crazy it might seem. In fact, it might serve us well to think of what we might have advised that young healing evangelist if He had submitted His prompting to us by saying, "God is telling me that if I spit in the dirt and rub mud into this guy's eyes, his blindness will be healed."

If God has used any part of this tract to change your life, or someone else's you know, please write us and let us know. It encourages us!

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Seasoning The Media Arts

Jesus told us that we are the salt of the earth. Simple enough. We all know that salt only works by direct contact. It doesn't matter how close I hold my salt shaker to my potatoes — until I shake some crystals out onto my fries there will be no effect.



I'm not writing to convince you that the Media Arts need a house-cleaning. Most people are tired of the sexual excesses, graphic violence, and the tearing down of family values expressed today in the name of "art." Even many secular surveys show the majority of Americans are saying "enough already!" They're talking about remedies on government levels and sure, tougher laws and limitations will be a big help. But there's a fact we're forgetting. Stricter laws will only help control the worst of what is wrong. But laws will do nothing to insert, or create, a better alternative. A superior message. That can only be created by people who have that superior message in their hearts.

We believe the devil's power to corrupt us is stronger than God's power to preserve us.

Art Is Not Abstract

We must remember "art" is not an abstract entity. Art is the personal expression of the artist who creates it. It reflects the heart of the artist — his values, morals, and the statements he wants to make. People act, sing, write, paint, and produce works that have meaning to them. If we want art to reflect the moral values this nation so desperately needs — then people who believe in those values must be willing to create it.

Exit: The Christian Artist.

Exit? Yes, that's what I said. Exit.

This is the crux of the problem. Christians have abandoned the Media Arts. Actually, we've fled them like the plague. Our reasoning? We believe the devil's power to corrupt us is stronger than God's power to preserve us. Before you get too mad at me, let me put it in another light.

What would you think if you overheard someone tell a young Christian administrator, "Whatever you do, don't consider business as a career. The business world is filled with corruption, white-collar crime, dishonesty, and greed. The temptations will be too much for your faith. Spiritually, it's too risky. Do something else."

The warnings are valid, but we generally have faith to believe that Christians can go into business, withstand the temptations, and maintain their integrity and their Christian witness. In fact, we'd encourage them to be "salt" by setting high moral standards to influence the business world at large.

Sadly, we don't have the same faith when it comes to the world of Media Arts. Instead of getting involved to raise

the moral standards and restrain the cancer, we've retreated in fear of being infected. There's too little salt there to preserve and purify the world's most influential public arena.

We have lost direct contact.

The Media Arts have decayed.

Healing The Root

There was a problem in Jericho. The water was bad. So God told Elisha to take salt, a purifying agent, and sprinkle it on the root of the problem — the poisoned spring. Then Elisha said, *"Thus says the Lord, 'I have purified these waters; there shall not be from there death or unfruitfulness any longer.'" (2 Kings 2:21)* God didn't mess with the fruit, the bad water, He made direct contact with the root.

Today God wants to send His artists to the root of a poisoned area of society so it too can be purified from death and unfruitfulness.

Salt is also a preservative. Before refrigeration existed, salt was rubbed into meat to keep it from spoiling — or being corrupted from bacteria. Our Christian influence works in a similar way. It restrains the corruption of the world, which if left unchecked, multiplies as quickly as bacteria on a hunk of meat.

When America was young, the Church actively used the most popular and available medium of the day — literature. Concerts and plays were popular too, but since they had to be seen in person it was a rare treat, especially for those living rurally. But even that helped the gospel advance because when traveling preachers went to small towns, their visits seemed like "media events." Often the whole town showed up just to hear the new public speaker.

Today we're light years past our Pony Express days. Billions are impacted every day by the most powerful Media Art in history: radio, network and satellite TV, films, recorded music, videos, computers, etc. Their "voices" shape the values of whole nations. We use current Media Art to some degree for our message, but we have lots of catching-up to do. However, let's not feel intimidated. In the 80s Jesus led us to "salt" our government, and look how far we've come. Likewise, Jesus is now calling us to increase our direct contact with the Media Arts.

Are Parables So Terrible?

The Church as a whole has kept a very tight, if often unspoken, reign on its artists. We've drawn narrow and creatively limiting lines, hoping to keep our artists from compromising the truth. Because of this, many artists feel that to be accepted as true believers, all they paint, write, sing, produce etc. must have an overt Christian message. Movies need an altar call, songs and books must talk about God, and artwork needs a scripture somewhere. But God does not call every artist to minister so directly.

We forget that Jesus often spoke in parables. He told stories in the common terms of His culture to demonstrate kingdom principles and our need for a Savior. He talked about fig trees, vineyard workers, soils, servants, and virgins. Jesus loved real-life drama, too. The fish with the coin in its mouth, and the eyes He healed by rubbing spit and dirt into them, was theater at its very best.

Jesus spoke directly, too.

Especially to the Pharisees.

One night Jesus and His disciples were sharing a meal with a bunch of sinners, including tax gatherers known for malpractice. The Pharisees questioned His ministry methods — and His choice of friends. Jesus said, *"It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick...I desire compassion, and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners"* (Matt. 9:12,13).

The point is, Jesus knew His audience. He had direct contact with them. He knew what, and how much, they needed to see and hear. And His timing was always perfect.

We must give our artists the liberty to share their message with their audience the way they believe God is leading. And we need to tell them it's OK if every work doesn't include the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Otherwise we tempt them to make an unfair choice: Either give up their art to stay in fellowship with us, or silently slip out from under our judgmental gaze to pursue their vision.

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Let's Cross Over

In the kingdom, one plants, another waters, but it's God who brings the growth. There is a huge need for godly "seeds" to be creatively planted regarding things like family, purity, fidelity, honesty, faith in God, etc. Every artist who creates a right and moral message helps move hearts toward what is right.

We are gifted with people like preachers, teachers, worship leaders and many, many others who are called to share the Word very directly. Their ministry is vital because without hearing the Word we cannot be saved.

But not everyone is ready to hear the Word.

Some need a few seeds planted first.

Before I met the Lord, I had several powerful spiritual experiences triggered by music and movies. The world tapped into a nugget of truth and God used it to speak deeply to my hungry spirit.