

The Master Artist

from Birthright by David Needham

Try to imagine yourself growing up in a family in which your father is a master artist, world renowned. His sketches are considered by everyone to be the ultimate in artistic perfection alive, so expressive. But you are not just part of this family, you were born into this family even as you were born into the family of God.

Because of this, deep within you is a nature that loves art. Although your last name isn't Rembrandt or Rockwell or Dali – your last name is Christian.

You decide the time has come to start producing your own works of art. You build your own little studio with a large window on the north side to catch the best light. You get all the best equipment in place, easel, palette, oils and brushes, water colours, pen and ink, the very best of materials. You're ready to start.

Having watched your father so many times, you move your pen across the clean white sheet, producing your own creative lines. Again and again you make your flourishing strokes. You discard the first sheet, then the second, a third, a dozen later. But still the sketch remains locked inside your mind as only a dream. What is on paper is pure mockery of what you dreamed.

More practice, harder work, longer hours, it will improve. But no, it doesn't. The talent simply is not there. That crucial heart-hand co-ordination never was and never will be!

Could there be a more tragic discovery? like loving music yet being unable to carry a tune. What you wish the most, you cannot produce. What you do produce deserves only to be trashed. How could this be? What happened in your birthing? Where is your father's touch?

Pulling the drapes and locking the door, you leave with shattered dreams. Tomorrow you will give it one more try and then it's over – nothing but an ugly fantasy

The next day father comes to visit. There stands the master artist, your father.

"Well, son, how is it going?"

"O Father, not well at all. I am embarrassed to show you anything I have drawn. And I tried so very hard!"

Smiling, your father pulls a sheet from a long tube – one of his own perfect sketches. "My son, I have one request to make of you for today. Will you trace my lines?"

Trace! How could he possibly say that? Where is my creativity, my talents, my originality? If I trace the lines, they won't be mine, but his. Fighting your frustration, you bite your lip, holding back the anger swelling within. With a forced smile, you agree to his request. You love and respect him too much to say no.

Alone again, you stare at his sketch. So flawless, so alive. Well, a promise is a promise. But I must have misunderstood. Surely he meant copy and not trace. At least in copying, there would be something of myself.

Placing your own paper next to his, you begin to copy his lines. You try your best. Again and again you try; but it's not only not the same, it's just plain awful. You try to fix it up with your own flourishes, but it

only makes it worse. Now, more discouraged than ever, you turn back to your own independent sketching.

Next day, father returns. "Well, son, how did it go?"

"O my Father, not well at all. I really worked hard, as hard as I could to copy your sketch. But I simply couldn't do it. Father, why can't I do what you do?"

"Copy, you say? But I asked you to trace it. Here, before I leave, is another fresh sketch of mine I drew especially for you. But please, this time, do what I ask. You have a tracing table; use it."

"Trace it." Again I struggle with the idea. "Where is my independence? Where is my art?"

In the same way, Christians come to the Word of God, reading it in all of its perfection, seeing its purity, sensing its joy. But what happens when it comes to actually living it—tracing the lines—when my thoughts of necessity must be on what I am doing rather than on God? What then? It is as though God's artistry is covered up by my own life. Since an empty life is too embarrassing, I draw the best lines I can. Though I might fool some people, anyone who truly knows the Master Artist will not be fooled at all.

Flicking on the Light

Suddenly – "Why didn't I think of it before?" – you remember the light underneath your tracing table. A flick of the switch and there, in an instant, your father's art comes through in all of its beauty, right there through your sheet. With your pen or pencil you begin to follow those lines, captivated by what is beginning to appear on your sheet. Soon all thought of independent It's my work! creativity dissolves under joyous wonderment at the strokes of the master artist. The hours race by as you finish the final lines and the delicate shading. But there it is! Reproduced through your fingers, with your sketching tools on your distinctive paper – his artistry! At last, what was in your heart by birth, his nature, is being expressed in life!

Probably you have already guessed by now that the light is the Holy Spirit. He alone is the one who transfers God's artistry, his Son, into human experience. By choice, you affirm to God that you are not only open, but passionately depending upon the enabling power of the Holy Spirit – you turn on the light. The sketching tools and the 'distinctive paper' represent your unique individuality. Probably you have also guessed that every fresh picture is the face, the life of Jesus, in all sorts of different circumstances, different poses, different shadings; but always Jesus.

Everything has changed. By choice you repudiate any thought of willful independence. Have you lost your freedom? Not at all! You have discovered an entirely new type of freedom—freedom from self-centeredness, freedom from the sin of pride. Each day brings with it a freshness, . a sense of expectation beyond your dreams. Gradually it becomes automatic to reject your own creations. Why would you think for a moment of tampering with the Master Artist's lines? Each night you fall asleep imagining what sketch he might have waiting for you in the morning to add to the pages of your life

Reproducing the Son's Life in Our Own

There is security in possessing a pattern for anything we are making—a reason for hope that what we are doing will look and work the way it should. When it comes to New Covenant life, God takes little pleasure in our creativity, but he takes great pleasure as he sees the image of his Son in us. We have no life apart from Jesus' life, We have no power apart from the Spirit's power.

This then is the kind of life that must mark the Christian of today, if Christianity is to even survive to the next generation.

"The works that I do are my Father's works."

"The words that I speak are my Father's words."

"I live because of the Father."

"You live because of me."

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you"

"For me, to live is Christ."

Such an attitude is the only cornerstone for Victorious Christian Living.

The above article and illustration is excerpted from *Birthright, Christian Do You Know Who You Are?* by David Needham

Used by permission of Multnomah Publishers, Inc.

For ministry use only, not to be copied for any other purposes.

Birthright is available in Christian bookstores and from Crossways to Life. The profound truth of Christ living in us, and the absolute necessity of total dependence upon that life in us, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit is only one of the many conclusions that Dr. Needham expounds in this classic. The book is Biblically based in its presentation of the believer being a partaker of the very life of Christ and deals very factually with this central theme. It is extremely well documented and is excellent for one who wishes to be firmly grounded in the basis of living in Biblical Victory.

Crossways to Life highly recommends this book for those wishing to live in the full reality of Christ living in them.