

Rhythmic Wholeness

- Life-giving healing and liberation

SETTING THE SCENE

Question

“How can creativity release and heal?” - physical creativity is a medium that communicates beyond words, reaching depths and traumas often inaccessible to anything else

Aims of the session

- To look into ideas of how physical creativity can release and heal
- To help the participants explore the connection between healing and creativity
- To provide an insight into how these 2 elements are an integral part of the spiritual journey, and in connecting with God
- To look at this from both an individual, corporate and historical perspective

Knowledge and understanding

- Knowledge and understanding of how creativity can open up paths to healing and restoration
- Understanding of the potential interdependence of creativity and healing?
- Understanding of how this relates to our walk with God
- Understanding of how this might be applied to their lives and communities

Skills and abilities

- To have been given confidence (and encouragement) to use certain creativity tools to express ourselves in a way that can lead to healing and release
- To understand how to draw this out of others

FINDING THE RHYTHM

Brokenness and wholeness

Within creation there is brokenness. Among those created there are broken people. For some it is physical; but for many it is much deeper than that, emotional, psychological and spiritual. Christians believe that the purpose of creation is that it should be whole and complete and good. This is part of the understanding of the astonishing biblical concept of *shalom*. This is the energy behind the idea of ‘rhythmic wholeness’.

Doctors and nurses have demonstrated astonishing creativity in helping to put people’s broken bodies together, everything from keyhole surgery to prosthetic limbs and a great deal in between. Parallel to this artists of many kinds have found ways to



aid healing by the skills of painting, pottery and sculpture (not to mention numerous other dextrous skills and delights), along with dance, drama and music making, as we shall see.

Creativity can reach for wholeness in the darkest and bleakest of traumas, the poems, drawings and songs from the concentration camps, the heart-rending games played by child-soldiers or stress-filled paintings from children in war-torn cities and lands; each one reaching out for something good within the darkness.

For so many, just being within nature and creation is healing; the open air, the big skies, the hills, mountains, moors and the sea. Its sounds, smells and stimuli reach deep within us. The impact can be dramatic. Animals are healers; whether a housebound grandparent with arthritis enjoying the company of a budgie, cat or dog, or a sickly child swimming with dolphins. It is even there in the stories of Colin and 'The Secret Garden' or Heidi in the Alps.

Creativity can bring healing and wholeness to the most tragic of cases, but it is there as a way for all of us to discover wholeness. Whether it is simply thinking positive in stressful situations or cooking a meal, planting a window box or a garden, or having deep conversations with friends or doing acts of kindness for others. Then there is humour climaxed by full-bodied laughter, mentally it helps give us perspective and physically its health and healing properties are huge and it is such good fun as well!

Creative biblical healing

There are many biblical healings; they are one of the demonstrations of God's power, but there are also some very unusual and creative accounts as well, which should encourage us to expect the unexpected and to experiment with possibilities ...

▪ Moses and the serpent of bronze ...

'So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it on a pole, and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the bronze serpent and live'¹

▪ David's soothing harp ...

'And whenever the evil spirit ... came upon Saul, David took the harp and played it with his hand and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him'²

▪ Naaman in the Jordan ...

'So Naaman went down and immersed himself seven times in the river Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean'³

¹ Num 21:9

² 1Sam 16:23

³ 2Kg 5:14



▪ **A pool called Bethesda ...**

'Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep gate there is a pool called Bethesda ('House of Mercy') which has five porches. In those lay many invalids – blind, lame, paralyzed waiting for the stirring of the water. For an angel of the Lord went down at certain times into the pool and stirred up the waters, whoever stepped in first ... was made whole ... Jesus asked a sick man, "Do you want to be made well?" "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool ..." Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk!"⁴

▪ **Jesus and the man born blind ...**

'Jesus saw a man blind from birth ... he spat on the ground and made mud from the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go wash in the pool of Siloam ..." He went, washed and came back able to see'⁵

▪ **Tree of Life ...**

'In the middle of the street of the city, and on either side of the river, is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations'⁶

Exploring possibilities

'Rhythmic Wholeness' is a huge topic and we can do no more than simply scratch the surface, but we want to begin thinking about what some of the possibilities might be.

We recognise as well that this is a subject, which in some areas in practice demands a great deal of skill and expertise. We nevertheless want to reflect on what some of the demands might be in the hope that we will better understand what many of the demands actually are.

However, there is much here to inspire us and with which we can explore and experiment in our own lives and circumstances. There is also a significant link with 'The Story Stick', which we will explore together around the meal this evening ...

'Pleasant words are like honeycomb
sweetness to the soul and health to the body'
(Prov 16:24)

We hope they inspire you

CARRIE'S STORY

A few years ago, I had a bit of a bad Monday morning. I got up very early and decided to walk to work. At 5.00 am I left the house, dressed, not in my usual

⁴ Jn 5:2-9

⁵ Jn 9:1-7

⁶ Rev 22:2



business attire, but wearing red converse boots, torn red jeans, a green checked shirt and to top it off, a lime green towel round my head in a turban.

As I walked down my road, past the bus station and down to the Thames I felt elated, as though God was with me and it was going to be a wonderful day. An hour or so later, I was sitting on the cold dark ground, by the water, my hands covered in mud and reliving all the worst times in my life.

By 9.00 am, instead of sitting at my desk sipping coffee and looking at million pound budget spreadsheets, planning appraisals for my team members in the office. I was in the back of a police car.

See IMAGE:
Cell – oil on stretched canvas

To cut a long story short, I'd been arrested at a Mercedes dealership, taken in to custody and eventually referred to the local hospital where I was sectioned under the mental health act.

A few days later my sister – six months pregnant – came to visit me on the ward. She pointed out that the little hand written notice 'Art Therapy on Mondays at 10.00 am'.

See IMAGES:
Hands and black bars – A3 poster paint
Heart and flower – A3 poster paint
Alarm clock – A3 poster paint
Blue eyes – Oil on stretched canvas

I'd had twenty-eight years of doing the right thing. I had a good job, worked hard, enjoyed spending time with friends, was on my church council, gave money to charity, didn't take recreational drugs, stayed fairly sober, wasn't violent. I recycled. But I was out of touch with myself. I'd become who I thought I was meant to be.

Suddenly, even once I'd recovered from my ordeal and was back at work, I faced disintegration. How could I trust my intellect? My mind? My reason? My belief?

Always a sceptic, the pain of questions, of uncertainty, now plagued me. The pressure of reality, of conflict felt immense.

Now, over a decade later, I continue to need integration, to need wholeness, pace and balance in my life.

- When war was about to be declared on Iraq
- When my best friend's father died and her brother had been found guilty and given a ten-year stretch ...
- When I'm stuck in someone else's car going the wrong way down the motorway ...
- When my lover stops loving me ...



I fall apart again ...

See IMAGE:
A slide show with music – 3 x 2004 Uniform exhibition

It is the pace and balance of divine rhythm that brings me back together. Taking the pain and pressure to Christ; Letting the colours of the paints and the marks of the pencil or charcoal create a picture. Releasing the emotion on to the page, and sometimes the living room carpet. (!)

FINDING A WAY

Questions

- When a person is broken, what do you think might be some creative ways to help them move towards wholeness?
- What types of creativity work for you?

- What conditions can create a safe place for true expression?
- How can a person be enabled to feel safe while at the same time creatively expressing vulnerability?

- Disintegration is the opposite to wholeness. So how can we identify areas of disintegration in us and move from them, towards wholeness, on a daily basis?

SUPPRESSION TO SELF-EXPRESSION

Four stories of creativity and healing; listen as each of the stories are read to the whole group:

Dance and the Rwandan genocide:

Amber Gray (A well known dance therapist from Canada) tells this story about her time working with people traumatized and deeply damaged by the Rwandan genocide:

“I was asked to help a lady, who due to the horrors she had experienced during the horrors of the genocide in Rwanda she was unable to talk about anything that happened to her, which meant it was very hard to for the state to prosecute those



who had been involved in harming her. I was able to work with her through many months where we would create dance movements to act out and express the ordinary routines that she would go through each day; these included fetching and carrying water and other household chores. Although not related to the trauma, these actions of going through movements to express the lady's everyday routine was a start towards building trust with me and giving the lady another way to speak. After many months of work using these dance movements, the lady reached a stage where she was able to be vocal about the horrors she had suffered, enabling her to testify in court and for a prosecution to take place. Dance was key in her process of expression and healing, becoming a tool that enabled the lady to use in the place of speech and words, which to begin with were unable to reach deep enough to express and process her pain."

Music and art in England

A schoolteacher in the mid 1950s, at an independent school for girls aged 5-16 in London, tells this story:

"I taught art and crafts throughout the school. A girl aged 14 was disruptive in class, did not work, was obstinate and unpleasant in her manner. There was a difficulty at her home in that it appeared that the father had an affair and the girl was devoted to her sick mother. When the mother died her behaviour difficulties in all her classes became acute. She became depressed and attempted to hide her sorrow in unruly behaviour. At that time I sometimes played classical music records during the art classes. She had always enjoyed painting, but now she flatly refused to touch her work, and annoyed people around her. When I played the 'Hallelujah Chorus' from Handel's Messiah in her class she suddenly started painting rapidly and with intense concentration. Going around the class I approached her but she quickly painted black all over the picture, hoping that I could not see what she had painted. I did in fact just see that she had painted a mother and child scene. From this moment on she became quite calm and quiet. Soon she started a craze for crocheting a blanket for a charity and spent all her free time furiously working at this. When she had finished this enormous blanket she changed to being a particularly helpful, pleasant and amenable person."

Dance in Brazil

The story of a British lady, told by a friend at a Dance Movement Therapy Foundation course at Goldsmiths University, London.

"I felt a strong call to go to Brazil to find a church that enjoyed using dance as part of its worship. I had no idea what I was walking into, but through various contacts found exactly the church I was looking for. I loved dance and wanted to use it to help people but I had no idea how I could do this. I was drawn to a group of people in the church with whom I began to meet regularly, praying for God to touch their lives. Through times of dance, I witnessed a great deal of healing take place but I had no idea how to lead or develop people through this experience. I have subsequently returned to the UK to study an MA in dance therapy having witnessed its power and wanting to understand more about how I might use it to greater effect in peoples lives."



Gardening therapy

Elvin McDonald, an experienced gardener, says that connecting with creation in a creative and harmonious way can also help each of us in the journey towards wholeness.

“Involvement with plants teaches us responsibility, consideration for something living, and the rewards of being patient ... it generally helps establish a feeling for how the world works. I used plants to cope with a difficult divorce and an unwanted move. While watering, grooming and re-potting, I found that everyday stress and anxieties fell away. Digging, weeding and smashing pots for drainage material gave me ways to channel my anger productively. Indoor gardening offered involvement and pleasure, and took me beyond myself. As the plants grew, they added grace and beauty to my barren apartment, and made me feel at home in the world once again. I believe that when we think of something as "therapy" we tend to expect it to do magic. However, there are no instant cures for life's ups and downs, but rather 'supportive holds' that help us put daily difficulties and annoyances into proper perspective. An involvement with plants can be such a supportive hold.”

Gardening is profoundly linked to nurturing, and the expression and creativity that gardening brings can also assist in our personal healing processes. A barren landscape can be transformed into a vibrant living garden and the process by which it comes into being can be cathartic and healing for the gardener. There is also something inherently spiritual about tending a garden, as it can be a metaphor of how we tend ourselves, and how God wants to tend us, to grow from a dormant seed in dry ground to a beautiful fruitful plant.

Some principles and history of Dance therapy

Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) is the psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance through which a person can engage creatively in a process to further their emotional, cognitive, physical and social integration. It is founded on the principle that movement reflects an individual's patterns of thinking and feeling. Through acknowledging and supporting people's movements the therapist encourages development and integration of new adaptive movement patterns together with the emotional experiences that accompany such changes. Dance Movement Therapy is practised as both individual and group therapy in health, education and social service settings and in private practice.

While the origins of dance as a healing art lie in ancient history, the contemporary profession incorporates dance, movement and psychological theories and therapeutic practices developed primarily in Europe and the USA. The profession is also informed by continuing international research.

A Dance Movement therapist has to go beyond intuition and be able to interpret the movement. The three aspects of DMT are:

- Clinical work
- Movement
- Observation for future research



History

The second generation of modern dancers, which included Marian Chace, Mary Whitehouse and Trudi Schoop, would independently use key elements of modern dance and pioneer the use of dance and movement with hospital patients and groups of people who had 'special needs'. By doing so they created Dance Movement Therapy.

Any history of DMT has to accord Marian Chace a premier position. When teaching dance she noticed that some of her students were first and foremost interested in expressing their emotions and were less interested in technique. She encouraged this form of self-expression in her students who reported feelings of increased well-being as a result of their sessions with her. Word reached psychiatrists at a nearby hospital and in 1942 they invited Marian Chace to work with them and their patients in the field of dance and exercise. Her patients were non-verbal and she worked with them in a way that let them know that she accepted them unconditionally. Chace's methods attracted others and by the 1950s DMT was being taken seriously at the hospital; since then, it has developed in many ways.

DMT can work on a one-to-one basis, but also with groups. It has been developed over the last 30 years and may soon be registered on the NHS in the UK. It is already available in the USA as part of their general healthcare.⁷ One of the main ideas behind DMT is that one can be seen without being judged. DMT is used in a wide range of settings including:

- Schools working with children with behavioural challenges
- Prisons
- Mental Health
- Working with different cultures within a community

"Dance also crosses social and cultural barriers and can transcend history, allowing an action to take place that reignites the past and creates states of mind in the witness to the performance which can be powerful recreations of a certain time or event ". Georgina Butt

FINDING WHOLENESS: A MEDITATION

*Conclude with a reflection on your own creativity, healing and restoration or that of someone close to you.*⁸

⁷ References

Payne, H-'Dance Movement Therapy: Theory and Practice.' Routledge, London and New York, 1991

Places to study

Goldsmith's University London, Foundation and MA courses

Roehampton University Association for Dance Movement Therapy in the UK, see www.admt.org.uk

⁸ This meditation is loosely based on a Sufi contemplative exercise. (Sufism is an ancient strand of Islamic mysticism). Music will be played to create a contemplative atmosphere.



Step One: Begin the meditation by giving yourself space to relax, centre yourself and concentrate on your breathing.

Step Two: Picture the (*creative*) miracle performed by Jesus on the man born blind, for whom he does an unexpected thing – created mud by spitting in the dirt and putting it on the man’s eyes. When he washes it off, he is able to see. Imagine this scene, and imagine being that blind person, you could invite Jesus to take away your spiritual blindness so that what follows can be even more profound on a spiritual level.

Step Three: Picture yourself sitting under the branches of the ‘Tree of Life’, by the ‘River of Life’ at the centre of the ‘New Jerusalem’, symbol of the renewed creation in its totality:

- What does it look like and feel like?
- Allow thoughts / issues / relationships that might stand in the way of experiencing wholeness to come up to the surface
- Speak the word *shalom* to each situation / instance.
- Picture, in a creative way, the transformation of that situation into one which resembles wholeness and *shalom*. (For example, low self-esteem might be pictured as a clay sculpture or figure, crouched over and hiding; as *shalom* is spoken to it the clay figure is moulded gradually into someone who is standing upright, with dignity, face turned up wards, and with confidence).

Step Four: Remain still and silent for as long as you wish.

Reading and Resources

R Alter ‘**The Art of Biblical Narrative**’ Basic Books 1983

E de Bono ‘**Serious Creativity**’ HarperCollins 1995

C Booker ‘**The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories**’ Continuum 2004

J Cameron ‘**The Artist’s Way**’ Pan Books 1995

J Cameron ‘**The Vein of Gold**’ Pan Books 1997

M Csikszentmihalyi ‘**Creativity**’ Harper Perennial 1997

JE Davies (Ed) ‘**Stories of Change: narrative and social movements**’ State University of New York 2002

NM Jackson (Ed) ‘**Right to Dance**’ Banff Centre Press 2004

A Koestler ‘**The Act of Creation**’ Picador 1975

C Seerveld ‘**Rainbows for the Fallen World**’ Stride Publications 1988

