

Parent *pages*

DECEMBER 2009 • VOL. 9 No. 4
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God blesses us with creative minds; help your children use them



As you listen to your child practice piano scales or watch an athletic practice, remember that God took a shepherd boy who was good with a sling-shot and led him to be a victorious king.

“THEN HE TOOK HIS STAFF IN HIS HAND AND CHOSE FIVE SMOOTH STONES FROM THE BROOK AND PUT THEM IN HIS SHEPHERD’S POUCH. HIS SLING WAS IN HIS HAND, AND HE APPROACHED THE PHILISTINE... DAVID PUT HIS HAND IN HIS BAG AND TOOK OUT A STONE AND SLUNG IT AND STRUCK THE PHILISTINE ON HIS FOREHEAD. THE STONE SANK INTO HIS FOREHEAD, AND HE FELL ON HIS FACE TO THE GROUND” (1 SAM. 17:40, 49).

The story of David and Goliath is a wonderful illustration of God-given talent and creativity. David was a good shot. He did not develop that talent by sitting on the couch playing sling-shot video games. It was developed by spending countless hours in the field with the responsibility of protecting the family livelihood. He no doubt practiced his aim over and over until, with God’s blessing, he gained both skill and confidence.

When he came face to face with a problem, David did not hesitate. He did not use the method recommended by his king, but instead used his skill and a handful of stones. He did this while his older brothers and the rest of the soldiers stood around with long faces. I am sure that many among the ranks had the skills to do what David did, but God chose to bless David with the faith and creativity to solve the Goliath problem.

Gifts, abilities, and talents are from our Creator. God does not bestow these gifts carelessly, be they athletic, academic, personal, or artistic. He gives His children gifts to use

to accomplish His goals for His kingdom. As parents, it is in the best interests of our children to pay attention to the development of talent and creativity.

Creativity is an important skill. In fact, if we do not spend some time developing creativity, children may develop it in ways we do not wish to promote, like “How many different ways can I find to make my little sister scream?” Let’s begin by debunking a few myths that surround creativity and talent:

► **MYTH NO. 1:**
YOU EITHER GOT IT OR YOU DON’T

Research in creativity has not revealed a specific talent or thinking process related to creativity. There is no reason to believe in a creativity gene that allows some people to do great things. Rather, it appears that creativity is developed and fostered. God gives us talents, but some of us bury them and some of us use them. We can develop in any child the ability to be creative. While we may be born with strengths that can lead to talent, talent actually develops over time and with

many hours of practice. Children who have opportunity and encouragement to practice a talent will also develop creativity in the use of their talent.

► **MYTH NO. 2:**
CREATIVITY IS ONLY GOOD FOR THE FINE ARTS

We think of artists, musicians, writers, and dancers as being creative. When you take a good look at the creative process, you realize it's about solving problems. It might be the problem of filling a blank canvas, composing a transition for a musical theme, or writing a great opening paragraph, but a problem is found and solved. Problem-solving is a skill that applies to anything: How do we get the ball past the goalie? How can I put my opponent in checkmate? How can I solve this math problem? What is the theme of this book? How can I get friends to join this club? How can I get my allowance to last all week? Learning how to observe, make lists, brainstorm solutions, evaluate possibilities, and try new things are all problem-solving skills that can, and do, transfer to other situations.

► **MYTH NO. 3:**
CREATIVITY CAN BE TAUGHT

Unfortunately, there is no lesson plan for creating creative children. If there were, I would be creatively boxing it up and selling it. Developing creativity takes work, practice, and time. It takes interactions with other people and activities that allow for trial and error. Developing creativity is a constant and long-term work-in-progress. But, as with David, the development of creativity can enhance any talent and learning process.

► **MYTH NO. 4:**
CREATIVITY IS A LEAP OF INSIGHT

Many of the organizations or methods that claim to teach creativity have it as a goal to promote an "aha" moment, a leap of insight, or out-of-the-box thinking. There is no evidence, however, to believe there is a connection between these kinds of activi-

ties and the development of creativity. In fact, the study of the creative processes of extraordinary individuals supports the idea that creativity is a complex combination of thinking processes—a process made up of practice, perseverance, trial and error, and the time needed to do these things.

When David showed up at the battlefield to check on his brothers, he immediately saw the problem. He considered his own talents and the tools he had, and then he devised a solution to the problem. Armed with a handful of stones and a strong God-given faith, he creatively solved the problem. However, this wonderful event did not just happen. God began to prepare David from a very early age. David's life and childhood gave him the time, tools, and motivation to develop his talent and creativity.

Here are some factors that are conducive to the development of creativity:

Time: Creativity is a multifaceted way of problem solving. Solving problems takes time and much trial and error. Problem solving requires hypothesis, research, and evaluation. This kind of thought process is more likely to happen when children work with a hands-on project. Think about the toys on your child's Christmas list. How many allow for time spent thinking, creating, constructing, or problem solving? Look for open-ended activities—like construction sets, art sets, and science kits—that give your child opportunities to explore and try things. Stay away from toys that promote sitting and watching or are limited to only one way to play.

Interaction: Trial and error are not useful if there is no evaluation. Creativity develops when students work with each other and work with a mentor. Several heads working together can more easily find a problem, create a list of possible solutions, and evaluate the possible solutions. Some creativity happens when a child

works alone on a project, but all creativity benefits from peer and mentor interaction. What activities can you promote with your child that involves other people? Is there something you could do as a family? Is there a project, such as building a playhouse or making a video, that can involve friends or siblings?

Integration: Children in elementary and middle school often wonder when they will use the skills they learn. Creative projects typically use many different skills. They might involve reading, computer research, measuring, or verbal negotiation skills. While busy working on a project that involves calculations, reading, and writing, children and their parents may not even realize how they use and improve those skills. It is difficult to be creative in one subject without using skills from another.

The shepherd David had many hours of problem-solving practice as he tended sheep. God showed him how to develop his talents, and, through this, blessed him with confidence. This same blessing awaits your children as they develop their God-given gifts.

For Discussion:

- List examples of creative problem-solving from Bible stories.
- Make a list of interests and talents you have noticed in your children. Can you think of a family project that could develop these interests?
- Make a list of the toys in the house. Which toys promote problem solving and creativity and which do not? Is there a balance?

For further study:

The Power of Play: How Spontaneous, Imaginative Activities Lead to Happier Healthier Children by David Elkind.