

“FROM STARDOM TO SONSHIP”

By Sandra Godde

I'd like to talk about an area that is of particular interest, and danger, to artists and emerging artists, and **THAT IS the PURSUIT OF FAME** that insatiable longing to be publicly noted and applauded for our expertise, especially by those in our particular industry. It is that excessive need to be validated by others in the work we do, which can seriously interfere with our enjoyment of it. It is not fame per se that is the problem, just like money is often not the problem, but rather it is the “love of it” that pushes a human being to compromise on their integrity, that becomes the dangerous addiction.

Now, don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with pursuing excellence in your field of artistic endeavour, and even measuring your work against others in your field. This dedication to your art is healthy and often leads to the appropriate humility necessary to become great at what you do. However, what I'm talking about, and I'm sure you know it, is that insatiable desire for the affirmation of men and this world, without which some people can never be happy.

Fame is not the same as success, and the accolades of this world are not the same as the pleasure of our Heavenly Father. This is the issue I'd like to talk about today and it is really about “becoming free” and learning to walk in “self acceptance” in the midst of a world that is bound up with all sorts of unspoken man-made rules and restrictions that cripple us, especially as creative artists.

It is about making the shift in perspective from striving to be a STAR to longing to be a SON or DAUGHTER of the Most High God. Our sonship in God is where our true identity and affirmation comes from. Knowing, I mean really knowing, our sonship status before our heavenly Father is so much more reliable than the fleeting pleasures of fame, or the fickle and transient affirmation of men and this world system.

I know this to be true by personal experience. As a young person I always wanted to be a famous ballerina. At the tender age of 15 yrs I began my professional dance career when I was accepted as a student at The Australian Ballet School in Melbourne. I grew up very quickly in the big city and began mixing and socialising with other dance students and Company members, and a whole new world opened up to me. However, along the way in my journey, my desires began to change as I discovered things about this world and about myself that caused me to alter my priorities.

One thing that happened to me was that I began to lose my joy in dancing. Choosing a professional dance career seemed to mean that my identity was wrapped up in pleasing a particular Artistic Director of a Company that I desired to work with, and this meant that

I felt like a commodity that could be accepted or rejected on a whim of a Director. You know at 18 years of age I could be forgiven for not having a solid sense of self that would protect me from seeing things this way. Most teenagers are still very influenced by peer and social pressures at this age. Furthermore, keeping ridiculously thin, beautiful, and technically superior to everyone else seemed to be every dancer's goal because the competition for Company contracts was fierce, and places were few and far between. It felt soul destroying to me to be in this environment and although I loved to dance, I figured if this lifestyle was a prerequisite to a dancer's career I seriously had to reconsider whether or not that is what I wanted.

I also remember being very disturbed when we were on tour with the Company, seeing some of the soloists and principals (whom I had previously aspired to be like) engaged in immoral and extra-marital affairs, taking drugs, and generally in very bad shape emotionally and mentally, except when they were on the stage and in the limelight. I'm sure not all the dancers were like this but unfortunately the bad examples made an impression on my tender heart. This shattered me somewhat and all my illusions of being deliriously happy as a ballerina were sorely challenged. Even now, when I meet up with some of my friends who soldiered on to have illustrious careers in dance, they don't seem all that happy now; once they step out of the limelight their lives feel empty to them. I have also had experiences with notable and wealthy men that have taught me that fame and money don't necessarily bring joy or contentment to one's life.

Yet there is something about our **unredeemed ego** that craves recognition continually and never is satisfied. Some people just can't seem to unhook themselves from "this system". Whatever we have, we want more. However good we are, we want to be better, because there is always someone better than us. **It can be a real bondage.** And it is not the mindset that God has given us. We do not have to live with the mindset that "we're never quite good enough" because we are told by scripture that "we have not been given a spirit of fear, but of love, power, and a sound mind." Furthermore, no one starts out doing what they want perfectly; we are all on a journey, and we need to validate ourselves on each step of the way. Greatness in any endeavour is achieved by many good, persistent choices in the course of a long journey.

We can develop in our craft, no matter where we are in that journey, and walk in peace with God, enjoying each stage and knowing that we are loved just the way we are, and are growing by His Grace. We are all made in the image of God. Each of us is an individual, unique, amazing bundle of gifts and strengths. There is no one just like you, with your DNA, and there is no one that has your special blend of "magic" in this world. Revelling in who God made YOU actually **glorifies God**; it is not the same as pride. Just imagine what sort of world it would be if we all actually LOVED being who God made us. What an absolute blast we all would have, if everyone really enjoyed being in their own skin!

PRIDE is thinking you are superior to others, whereas a healthy self esteem and confidence comes from God. The deep, inner knowledge that you belong to your Father, that you are unique, one of a kind, irreplaceable, and have a personal spot in

God's heart that no one else can fill, can only come from communion with the Living God. This inner knowledge gives you amazing courage and confidence to step forward and use your gifts to bring pleasure and glory to your Father in heaven.

When you take on this mindset, you are not out to prove yourself, to others or to yourself. You are not out to IMPRESS anyone, but rather you are out to BLESS. You now seek to be a blessing, to make a fruitful return on the gift that God has given you, and to bring Him pleasure by using your gift in the precise manner He created it for.

All sin is a misuse or abuse of what God has given us. The alternative of not using our gifts/talents or powers at all i.e. to bury them in the ground (like the unprofitable steward in scripture) was declared by the Lord to be a wicked thing to do. Rather, we are called to develop, cultivate, and multiply the gifts that God has put within us in seed form. **That is our RESPONSIBILITY!** We are to be stewards of all that God has given us. **Hiding our gifts under the bushel does not glorify God whatsoever.**

Ok, so I said that **FAME is not the same as Success.** We feel **success** at the end of a good day's work. But **fame is addictive**, and always leaves us hungry. Fame is a spiritual drug and can be very dangerous. It asks "How does it look TO THEM?" instead of "IS THE WORK GOING WELL?"

The point of the work IS the work! Fame interferes with that perception. Instead of say dancing being about dancing, it becomes about being a famous dancer. Remember, seeing yourself as God's child will make your contribution meaningful and give you the courage to continue to practice and perfect your gift, by adding to it hard work and training. (There is no excuse not to train in your craft just because you are a child of God!)

Consider this: **FAME is a shortcut for self-approval.**

Try accepting yourself just as you are, seeing yourself just as God sees you --- as His beloved Child. I think that what we are really scared of, is that without fame we won't be loved, as artists or as people. We can overcome this fear by lovingly engaging in our art. We can actively and consciously nurture our creative selves by doing the creative work we love. We do not need the approval of others to do this.

When the fame drug hits or you become jealous of other people's successes, go to your creative work and indulge in some creative play. Soon the fame drug lessens. The best cure for the fame drug is creating yourself. When we are joyful in our own creative work, we can release the obsession with others and their successes and/or failures.

As I mentioned earlier, my childhood ambition was to become a famous ballerina. But my experiences in life along the way, and my growth in knowledge about this world and myself, and ultimately my encounter with a Living God, caused me to significantly change my priorities and values in life. However, I still continue to have goals and ambitions. But now my most important goals are internal and personal; more about

WHO I am becoming rather than what I have achieved. They are not so dependent on outward recognition or worldly accolades, which are so fickle anyway; they come and go, and they don't make you feel any better if there is still emptiness inside. But now I work on filling up the void within with acts of kindness, creative endeavours, meaningful work that I love to do, and seeking to leave a legacy for others to enjoy.

For example, I seek to put God into my art and dance making, allowing the Holy Spirit to create and move through me as much as possible. I seek to add substance to the form by dancing or speaking about the things I am passionate about and that I believe are important to the heart of God. I endeavour to perform works that cause self-revelations in others, or stir up spiritual hunger or a passion for social change etc.

Another one of FAME'S RELATIONS that I wanted to briefly speak about today, IS THE SPIRIT OF COMPETITION, which is also rampant in the artistic industry and can be a real blockage to fruitful, creative endeavour.

Competition can be another spiritual drug. When we focus on competing with others, we can neglect and fail to appreciate our own well, and often our own progress is impeded by doing so. Have you ever seen an athlete at the Olympics running very well, only to look to his left to glance at his position in relation to his opponent, and by doing so lose his split second advantage at the finishing line? It happens.

We can ask ourselves the wrong questions and therefore get the wrong answers. Instead of asking "Why do I have such bad luck?" "What's the use?" "What do I have to offer compared to him/her?" We should ask ourselves more useful questions like:
"Did I work on my dance/play/music/creative endeavour today?"
"Have I done any networking on its behalf?"

When we make excuses for not doing our art, we are focussing on others and not taking responsibility for ourselves. Our creative work rightfully belongs within our own power. Much creative blockage is a result of an overemphasis on competition. As artists, we must go within our true selves and seek out our unique contribution to the world. We must attend to what our inner guidance is speaking to us. Obsessing about who is getting ahead of us and why they shouldn't be is self defeating behaviour.

The need to be BETTER THAN can obliterate the simple desire TO BE.

We cannot afford to be lead away from our own voice and choices in life. If we do, we become defensive and jealous, trying to be what we are not. This only causes fruitless anxiety. Trying to define our own creativity in terms of someone else's is counter-productive. Let us concern ourselves primarily with what God has put within us that is struggling to be born. All work is influenced by other people. But it is the EGO that demands to be first and best, or that our work be totally original.

We respond to art in the degree that it resonates with our own experiences. What we are doing is seeing an old idea in a new light. We are the origin of our art, its very home, so therefore originality is a process of remaining true to ourselves.

Be careful not to judge a new piece of work too quickly. Be willing to paint/write/ or dance badly while your inner critic yells resistance. Your lousy painting or dance may be pointing you in a new direction. Your bad writing may be necessary for a shift in your style. I must admit this is one of the hardest things for me to do; to overcome that perfectionist tendency in me not to create or dance anything until it reaches a particular standard, which is more often than not just plain unrealistic for where I'm at, and what I have to work with.

The antidote for the need to win approval from others, is to know the approval of our Heavenly Father. Doing the work is what matters and knowing that we are on a journey, not stagnant, but growing in grace and wisdom and skill..... finding out who we are, what is our voice, and what is our unique contribution to the world.

If you are happier writing/dancing/painting/directing than not doing it, then let yourself do it! Authenticity lies with you and God, not with the opinions of your friends and others. Our creativity is our gift from God. It's what makes us God-like. Using your gift glorifies God, and skilful craftsmen will stand out. Accepting our gifts is the beginning of true self-acceptance and gratitude to God.

© Sandra Godde
Excelsia Dance
Australia
heaven7@bigpond.net.au
