

Grit and Grace: Questions to Help with Creative Blocks

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Creative blocks can be deeply challenging and discouraging. Fortunately, if we are willing to engage with them creatively, we can sometimes break through them – and when we cannot break through them, we can practice sitting with them as a spiritual discipline.

The below questions draw on and expand on the resources previously posted to the Grit and Grace platform.

1. In my essay on the paradoxes of creativity, I set up a series of pairings: grit and grace, preparation and chance, perspiration and inspiration, etc. One question to ask in times of creative dryness is whether the problem is with the grit side, the grace side, or both. Are we having trouble working or waiting? Are we struggling with the labor or the openness to new ideas? If we can identify where the challenge is, we may be better able to address it.

If we are wrestling with grit (preparation, perspiration, work, effort, intentionality, focus, mindfulness), that calls for one type of approach. If we are laboring well enough but struggling with openness or patience, or finding that we are closed to receiving inspiration, that calls for another type of approach.

2. In keeping with the idea of the paradoxes of creativity, are we having a problem with humility or a problem with confidence – or both?

3. Do we need to sit with our truth, our story, our joy, or our pain to access our creativity? If so, how might we do that more effectively?

4. If we don't already have some kind of systematic creative process, would it help us to develop one?

5. Do we need to practice radical hospitality toward ourselves and our creativity, loving our creativity as we (strive to) love ourselves? If so, how could we do that?

6. Is the creative block about fear? Are we afraid of something related to the creativity itself or to a creative project? Could we identify what that is and work on it?

7. Do we need to be more comfortable, more at ease, to open up our creating? Alternately, could we possibly need to be more uncomfortable, willing to struggle, to engage what is difficult?

8. Could we use creativity exercises to break through the creative block? (I have provided some in one of the handouts and there are literally thousands of others out there on the web and in books on creativity.)

9. Do we need to engage our senses to reawaken our creativity? Alternately, is it possible that we need to engage with silence?

10. Is our challenge more related to knowing the rules or to being willing or able to break the rules?
11. Are we struggling more with the restrictions that go with creativity or with the freedom that undergirds it?
12. Could our creativity benefit from establishing one or more creativity rituals?
13. Our centering time during this workshop involves observing our energy, emotions, and bodies. Do we need to do some energy work, emotional work, or body work to loosen our creative block?
14. Do we see creativity as an obligation or as an opportunity? When creativity is an obligation, as, for example, in church settings, are there any ways we can reframe it as an opportunity?
15. Alternately, are our creative obligations part of a set of conflicting obligations that are pulling us in too many directions at once? Are we overwhelmed or resentful? If so, do we have any flexibility in managing our conflicting obligations so that we can spend at least some time in creative endeavors that are personally meaningful and restorative?
16. Is there something that we need to grieve in order to reopen our creative channels? Can we find safe times, places, and ways of doing that grieving?
17. If our creative blocks are coming from fear, rage, insecurity, or a sense of lack of safety, what do we need to do to get in touch with our best selves, our most hopeful and joyous selves?
18. Can our formal religious or faith practices help us unblock our creativity?
19. What kind of psychological or spiritual work/play or preparation or practices might help unblock our creativity?
20. If we think of creativity as a relationship, what in the relationship might need working on? Do we need to have a conversation with our creativity? Listen to it tell us some things? Change something to make it happier?
21. If we think of creativity as a spiritual discipline, how do we approach other spiritual disciplines during spiritually dry times? Can we bring any of those insights or practices to our creative lives?
22. Is our creative block about perfectionism? Are we unwilling to be sloppy, messy, imperfect, human? Are we unwilling to write that first draft and throw it out? If so, can we give ourselves a break, let ourselves be human and let the sacred be sacred?