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Inspiration Riffs

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Inspiration Riffs

A good drummer can take a few notes, set a rhythm, and improvise music that is wondrous to hear. When a drummer (or any instrumentalist or vocalist) "takes off" on his or her riff, listeners experience the results of both skill and inspiration at work in complementary roles within one person.

Everyone has moments of inspiration; most of us can identify times when we were inspired to speak or act, to think or create beyond our capacities as we knew them. We might have come to expect inspirations, to dispose ourselves for them, to seek for them.

If we cannot see, hear, touch, taste, or smell inspirations, we must have another set of senses for perceiving realities that are very important for us as individuals, and essential for engaging in relationships. We know that we are inspired when we open ourselves to more than ourselves, more than our history, training, skills, and development. Thoughts and energy flow together within our control but not wholly of our control. Just as we take in a breath of air, and gain energy without consciously controlling the transfer of oxygen to blood stream, we take in spirit (in-spiration) without controlling the transfer of spirit to our thoughts and decisions. We can talk about inspiration, but we do not manufacture it.

When we have been inspired, we might have written or spoken words that still surprise us as being our own; we might have made a quick move that protected a child from danger without recalling a conscious choice to do so. When we suddenly find a new insight, a special energy and a strong sense of resolve, we say that we were inspired. When we talk about "grinding out" the details of a project, we refer to the exercise of all our powers, unaided.

Receiving inspiration is as common among us as allowing thoughts to arise rather than trying to force them, as, for example, when we are composing an appropriate note on a birthday card. But few of us are likely to consider ourselves as having carried out riffs of inspired activity. If we look more carefully at our past experiences we might be surprised to recognize some of the "music" we have made in the midst of ordinary activities, and some inspired improvising that was a gift for others.

Riffs of inspiration occur when we are engaged in doing as well as we can some of the ordinary tasks that love requires. Mothers and fathers

give of themselves generously and repeatedly in raising children. At one time, parents might be entertaining guests, while taking care of children's needs, and also providing a meal for everyone present. They work hard, are wholly involved, and – without thinking of themselves as doing so – might well be involved in a riff of inspired love that is shown in deeds.

Inspiration and love are intimately related. The Spirit of God is Love. This same Spirit moves in us so that our thoughts and deeds might more fully match the love that God has for us and for all of creation. Love is not a "thing" that can be boxed, bought, and stored. Love is of spirit: our spirit and God's Spirit.

We cannot expect to be inspired all day, every day. But in addition to brief moments of inspired thought or activity, we also have extended periods of time when we let ourselves be guided without relinquishing control, when we are attentive to the task at hand without losing contact with our purpose, and when we use all the skills we have while finding yet more capability than was ours previously. Such experiences might well be described as inspiration riffs.