

Cross Current



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Master Pieces



One of the world's most beloved sculptures began as a statue of limitations.


During the 15th Century, leaders in Florence, Italy wanted to adorn their city cathedral with twelve large statues depicting heroes of the Old Testament. So in 1464, with two of the figures already completed, they commissioned Agostino di Duccio to sculpt King David.

Using all his skill and creativity, he worked intensely on a costly piece of marble from a quarry in northern Italy. But after two years, Agostino gave up, unable to coax any life from the stubborn stone. He succeeded only in roughing out the legs, feet and torso.

When Antonio Rossellino was brought in to continue the work, he was stymied too. He simply didn't have enough talent or tenacity, so the marble was dumped in the yard of a workshop where it lay abandoned for 25 years, exposed to the erosion of wind and rain.

But in 1501, a 26-year-old artist named Michelangelo convinced the city fathers to let him try and finish the statue of David. He started carving on the morning of Monday, September 13th and painstakingly brought to bear all the passion and creativity he possessed. Believing sculpture was the ultimate form of art because it imitated divine creation, Michelangelo often said the finished masterpiece was trapped in the stone — much like the human soul was lodged in the body — and that he simply had to chip away what didn't belong.

In 1504 the 5.17 meter (17 foot) statue was finally unveiled and placed in the city's main plaza where *David* quickly came to symbolize for residents the strength and passion of Florence which was



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that keeps our hearts
from losing
their warmth.

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surrounded on all sides by powerful rivals. Today, the sculpture is one of the most recognized works of art, revered for its beauty.

But it was only in 1991 that one dimension of the sculpture's mystery was finally revealed. That year, a vandal attacked the statue with a hammer, damaging toes on its left foot. When scientists studied samples, they found the marble was of mediocre quality and flawed by microscopic holes that caused it to deteriorate faster than other stones. It's a testimony to Michelangelo's will and genius that he could make such inferior material into his masterpiece.

So, too, we marvel at God's ability to use his transforming love and power to shape our weak wills, troubled minds and sin-scarred hearts into the image of his Son. But, like *David*, we emerge as that masterpiece only after a long and painful process.

It begins amid wonderful expectations that our lives to be sculpted into something bold and heroic. Anxious for approval and ready to accommodate, many of us entrust ourselves to people who are only too happy to shape us into their vision of who we should be. But, before long, they tire of us — perhaps because they recognize how imperfect we are — or we finally realize they don't have what it takes to bring out our inner beauty so we stop yielding.

Sometimes this happens repeatedly and we find ourselves discarded and thoroughly abandoned, vulnerable to the emotional forces that weather our soul and wear down our self-esteem. Then, just when it seems we'll never amount to anything, Jesus plucks us from the trash heap, recognizing the promise and potential that lies locked inside.

With unrelenting love and creativity, he frees us by chiselling away whatever obscures the spiritual poise, power and passion he wants to reveal in us. We must submit patiently to the vision and sheer artistry of Christ as he sculpts into being "*the incredible wealth of God's favour and kindness towards us*". His love and forgiveness are a gift we can never earn or deserve. "*Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*" (Eph. 2:7-10)

Though surrounded by powerful forces that work against us, we symbolize God's strength, passion and beauty. Figuratively at least, some values really are chiselled in stone.