

MACHINAE EX DEO



PHILOSOPHY
TECHNOLOGY
THEOLOGY
2024 ISSUE 3 - "BUILD"

FOREWORD

Building is joyous. And terrifying. And stressful. And difficult. And painful on so many different levels. But it is amazing, and a wonderful honor that we have to continue the same process that the Divine Creator took up.

This issue of the zine looks at this process a bit - why and how we take it upon ourselves to build.

And yes, we need to build, not just talk.

Well, sometimes rushing into the building doesn't work so well. Some hammocking is required. But we must eventually build.

*If this zine is inspiring to you, come
join our community building stuff
together at:
machinaeexdeo.com/p/join*

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THE BIRTH-PAINS OF INCARNATION

"Life sucks and then you die." We are often sold this message in modernity, but it is not really an old message. This world is pain. It will all wash away. We are told in Ecclesiastes 1:

VANITY!

VANITY!

SAYS THE TEACHER:

**"UTTERLY MEANINGLESS,
EVERYTHING IS MEANINGLESS."**

WHAT DO PEOPLE

GAIN

**FROM ALL THEIR LABORS AT WHICH THEY
TOIL UNDER THE SUN?**

Old King Sol spares no punches: it is a grueling world out there. Building things sucks - before, during, and after. The chances of success are slim. The chances of things lasting is nil.

Why go on? Well, Genesis 1:31:

GOD SAW ALL THAT HE HAD MADE, AND

IT WAS VERY GOOD.

The joys of this world are true - even if fleeting. They are a foretaste of the joys to come in Heaven if we are faithful - if we work diligently, if we build what we are called to.

ECCLESIASTES 11

*Ship your grain across the sea;
after many days you may receive a return.
Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight;
you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.*

*If clouds are full of water,
they pour rain on the earth.
Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north,
in the place where it falls, there it will lie.*

HE WHO WATCHES THE WIND

**WILL
NOT**

PLANT.

HE WHO WATCHES THE CLOUDS

**WILL
NOT**

REAP.

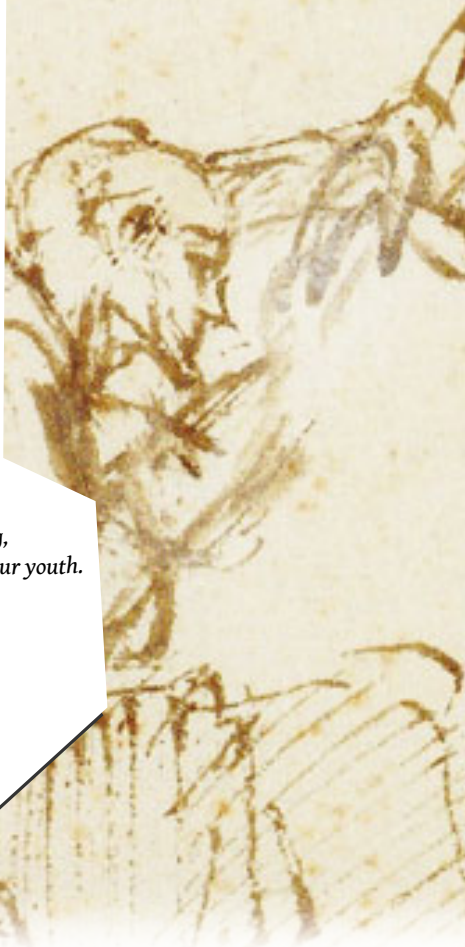
*As you do not know the path of the wind,
or how the body is formed in a mother's womb,
so you cannot understand the work of God,
the Maker of all things.*

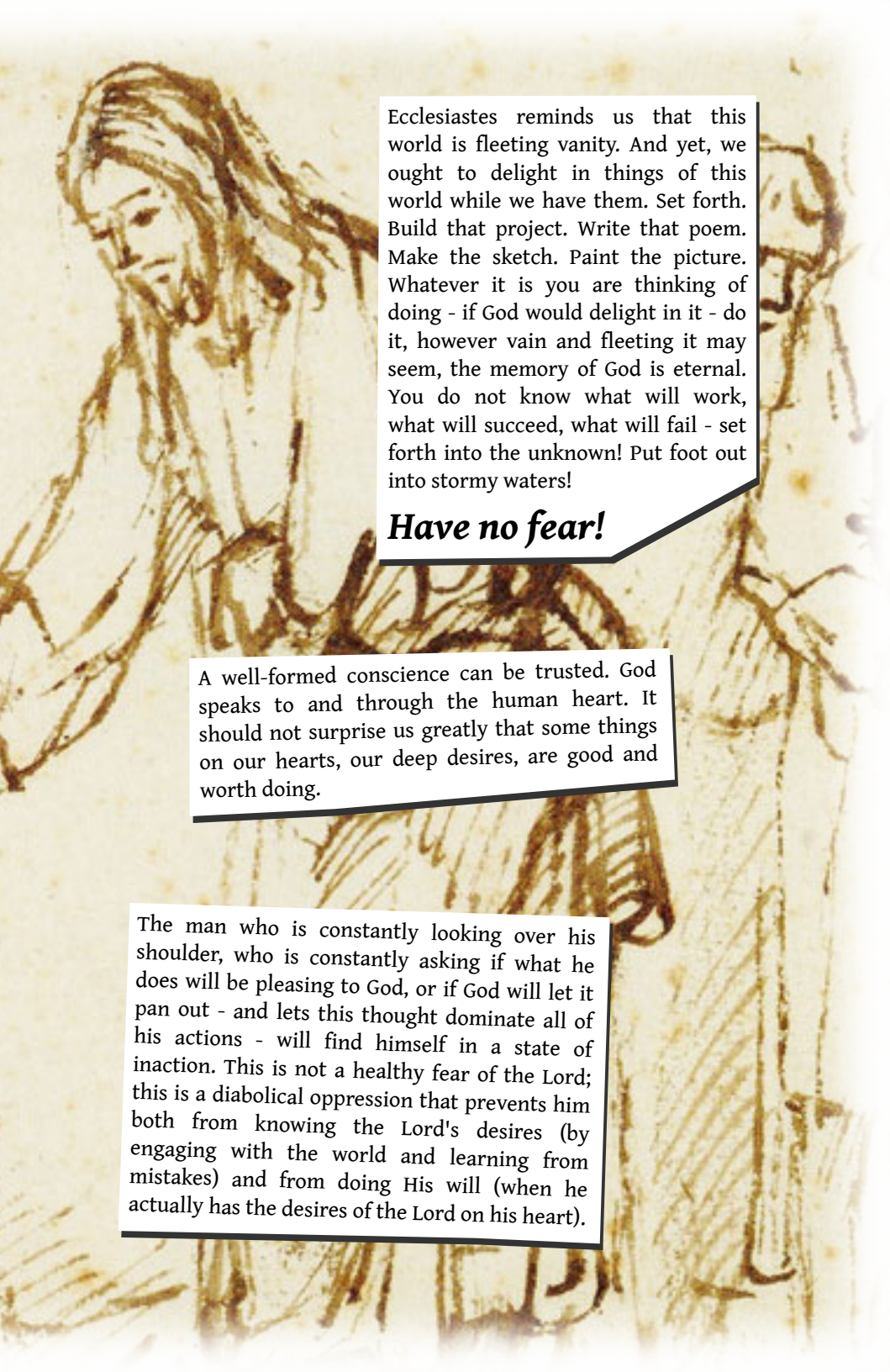
*Sow your seed in the morning,
and at evening let your hands not be idle,
for you do not know which will succeed,
whether this or that,
or whether both will do equally well.*

*Light is sweet,
and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.
However many years anyone may live,
let them enjoy them all.
But let them remember the days of darkness,
for there will be many.
Everything to come is meaningless.*

*You who are young, be happy while you are young,
and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.
**Follow the ways of your heart
and whatever your eyes see,
but know that for all these things
God will bring you into judgment.***

*So then, banish anxiety from your heart
and cast off the troubles of your body,
for youth and vigor are meaningless.*





Ecclesiastes reminds us that this world is fleeting vanity. And yet, we ought to delight in things of this world while we have them. Set forth. Build that project. Write that poem. Make the sketch. Paint the picture. Whatever it is you are thinking of doing - if God would delight in it - do it, however vain and fleeting it may seem, the memory of God is eternal. You do not know what will work, what will succeed, what will fail - set forth into the unknown! Put foot out into stormy waters!

Have no fear!

A well-formed conscience can be trusted. God speaks to and through the human heart. It should not surprise us greatly that some things on our hearts, our deep desires, are good and worth doing.

The man who is constantly looking over his shoulder, who is constantly asking if what he does will be pleasing to God, or if God will let it pan out - and lets this thought dominate all of his actions - will find himself in a state of inaction. This is not a healthy fear of the Lord; this is a diabolical oppression that prevents him both from knowing the Lord's desires (by engaging with the world and learning from mistakes) and from doing His will (when he actually has the desires of the Lord on his heart).

SUBMISSION TO THE CRAFT

When we labor and work, especially creatively, we cannot be distracted and thinking about other things: what we will eat, the weather, or even certain concerns and needs of others. The work has demands - at times, it demands our entire selves. We cannot do things however we please or however the world desires and expect good results. The relationship of a good craftsman to their work can appear idolatrous - and for some, indeed crosses the line. This would be the pursuit of the craft over and above the will of God - rather than the craft as an offering for God. God's infinitude is beyond our comprehension.

The world He created is an incarnate one. We foster devotion through our work; we draw to God through our work, through grappling with particulars, we approach the universal. The creative process is such a dance by which the infinite, the transcendent, becomes known to us - becomes tangible and comprehensible, even if it loses its infinitude and maintains only a link to it.

God's devotion to mankind is borne out on the Cross - His love is not for the Cross, but for Man. He was mindful of his end - he had spent years upon an eternity contemplating Man, holding the entirety of Man in His mind. And yet, to carry the Cross to the very end - is not simply some metaphor, some waxing poetical about how we ought to do hard things, but a historical reality: a material fact. This required attention not (only) to man or lofty things - but the practical, the immediate.

Christ the Divine Carpenter is the model of craftsmanship. The unknown becomes known. The divine becomes mundane. The infinite becomes finite. But this requires submission to the craft, submissions to the particular demands of incarnation, acceptance of limitation, attention to particulars.

But within this submission - there is freedom; true freedom. The infinite is freed from its limitation and spills into the finite; and the finite is joined back to the infinite in heavenly harmony.

Excerpt from an interview between Jonathan Pageau
and Chris Mastropietro (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5hTzorhQys>):

Chris: The kind of skill it takes to interpret a story and the kind of skill it takes to write a story are two different skills. When you're undertaking an analysis, a kind of careful structural analysis of a pattern of a story, there's a very conscious, meticulous, attention brought to bear to break apart the components. There's a real analytical frame of mind required to do that. But when you are creating something artistically, you have to **yield the process to the unconscious**. If it's not spontaneous, if it's too over-determined by an analytical process, it will fail.

SUBSERVIENT

**EVEN
TO**

DEATH

EVEN DEATH

ON A CROSS

Jonathan: When people are writing stories, I tell them, don't think about symbolism when writing a story - it will kill it! You can't think about symbolic structures when you write. You'll overthink it, you'll try to fit things in that don't fit the narrative. The way to do it is - you have to ruminate. You **ruminate** on the patterns, you let them sit, like they are fermenting in yourself. That becomes the wine out of which the story can be told. It isn't a story, a system, it's an intuition. Once you've put them down, you can come back with the symbolic mind - it's an editor. You can shift things. But the actual elements of a story come from a more immediate thing.

Chris: There's a kind of **divine forgetfulness** that you have to have... Many great artists are very studious and meticulous, but when it comes time to perform, they throw it all out. They forget. They find it in them to forget everything it is that they know, in order for a deeper form of reflection to take place... the logos of judgement that takes has to yield itself to the eros of generosity. There has to be a coordinated withdrawal for something to be brought forth.

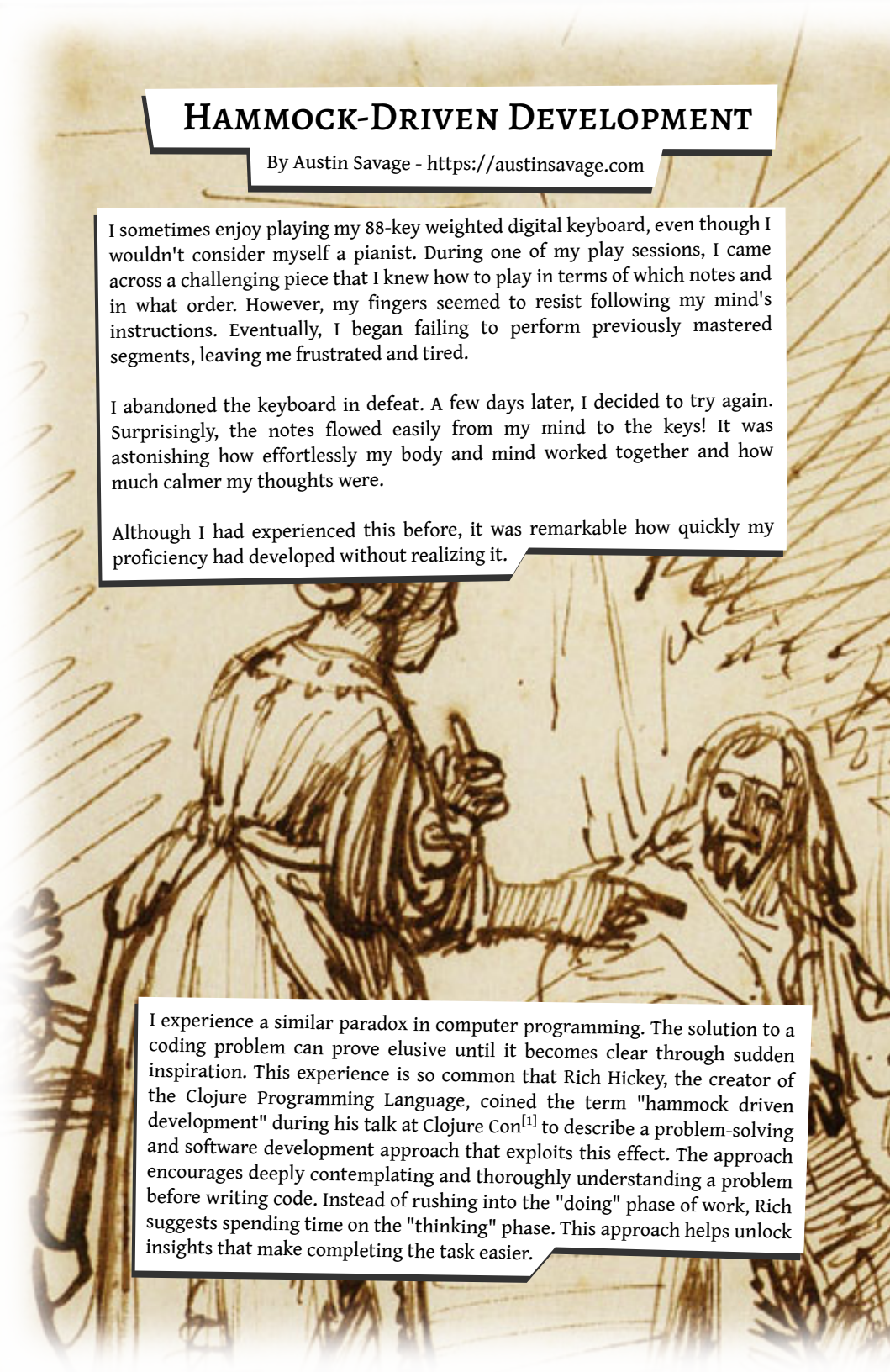
HAMMOCK-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT

By Austin Savage - <https://austinsavage.com>

I sometimes enjoy playing my 88-key weighted digital keyboard, even though I wouldn't consider myself a pianist. During one of my play sessions, I came across a challenging piece that I knew how to play in terms of which notes and in what order. However, my fingers seemed to resist following my mind's instructions. Eventually, I began failing to perform previously mastered segments, leaving me frustrated and tired.

I abandoned the keyboard in defeat. A few days later, I decided to try again. Surprisingly, the notes flowed easily from my mind to the keys! It was astonishing how effortlessly my body and mind worked together and how much calmer my thoughts were.

Although I had experienced this before, it was remarkable how quickly my proficiency had developed without realizing it.

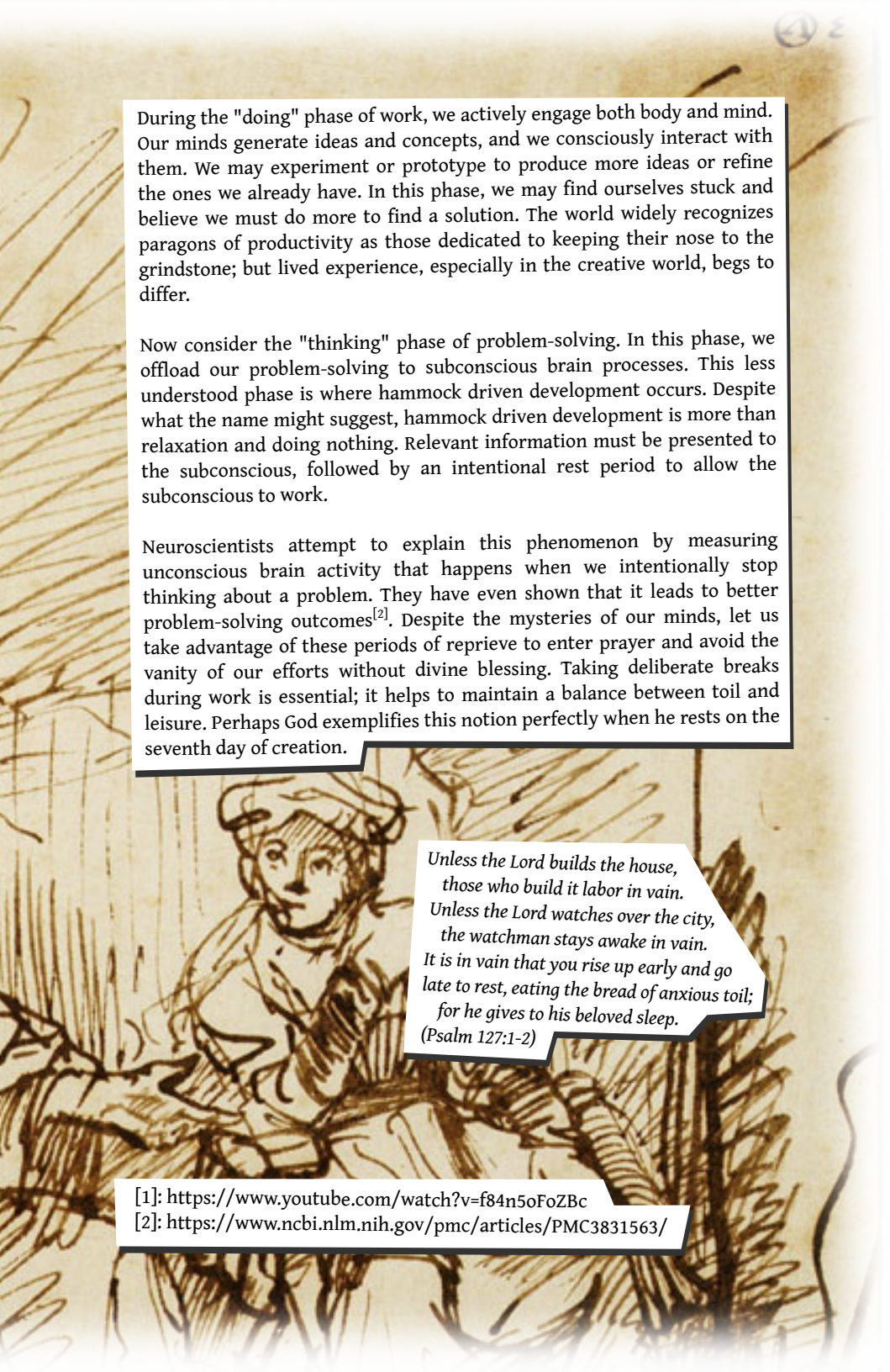
A background sketch in brown ink on a light tan background. It depicts two figures. On the left, a figure stands, seen from the back, wearing a long, draped garment. On the right, a seated figure with a beard and long hair looks towards the standing figure. The drawing is composed of bold, expressive, and somewhat chaotic lines, suggesting movement and energy. The overall style is reminiscent of a gestural or expressive sketch, possibly related to the 'hammock-driven' concept mentioned in the text.

I experience a similar paradox in computer programming. The solution to a coding problem can prove elusive until it becomes clear through sudden inspiration. This experience is so common that Rich Hickey, the creator of the Clojure Programming Language, coined the term "hammock driven development" during his talk at Clojure Con^[1] to describe a problem-solving and software development approach that exploits this effect. The approach encourages deeply contemplating and thoroughly understanding a problem before writing code. Instead of rushing into the "doing" phase of work, Rich suggests spending time on the "thinking" phase. This approach helps unlock insights that make completing the task easier.

During the "doing" phase of work, we actively engage both body and mind. Our minds generate ideas and concepts, and we consciously interact with them. We may experiment or prototype to produce more ideas or refine the ones we already have. In this phase, we may find ourselves stuck and believe we must do more to find a solution. The world widely recognizes paragons of productivity as those dedicated to keeping their nose to the grindstone; but lived experience, especially in the creative world, begs to differ.

Now consider the "thinking" phase of problem-solving. In this phase, we offload our problem-solving to subconscious brain processes. This less understood phase is where hammock driven development occurs. Despite what the name might suggest, hammock driven development is more than relaxation and doing nothing. Relevant information must be presented to the subconscious, followed by an intentional rest period to allow the subconscious to work.

Neuroscientists attempt to explain this phenomenon by measuring unconscious brain activity that happens when we intentionally stop thinking about a problem. They have even shown that it leads to better problem-solving outcomes^[2]. Despite the mysteries of our minds, let us take advantage of these periods of reprieve to enter prayer and avoid the vanity of our efforts without divine blessing. Taking deliberate breaks during work is essential; it helps to maintain a balance between toil and leisure. Perhaps God exemplifies this notion perfectly when he rests on the seventh day of creation.



*Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early and go
late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.
(Psalm 127:1-2)*

[1]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f84n5oFoZBc>

[2]: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3831563/>

MATTHEW 25:14-30

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

The man with two bags of gold also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more."

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you."

His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

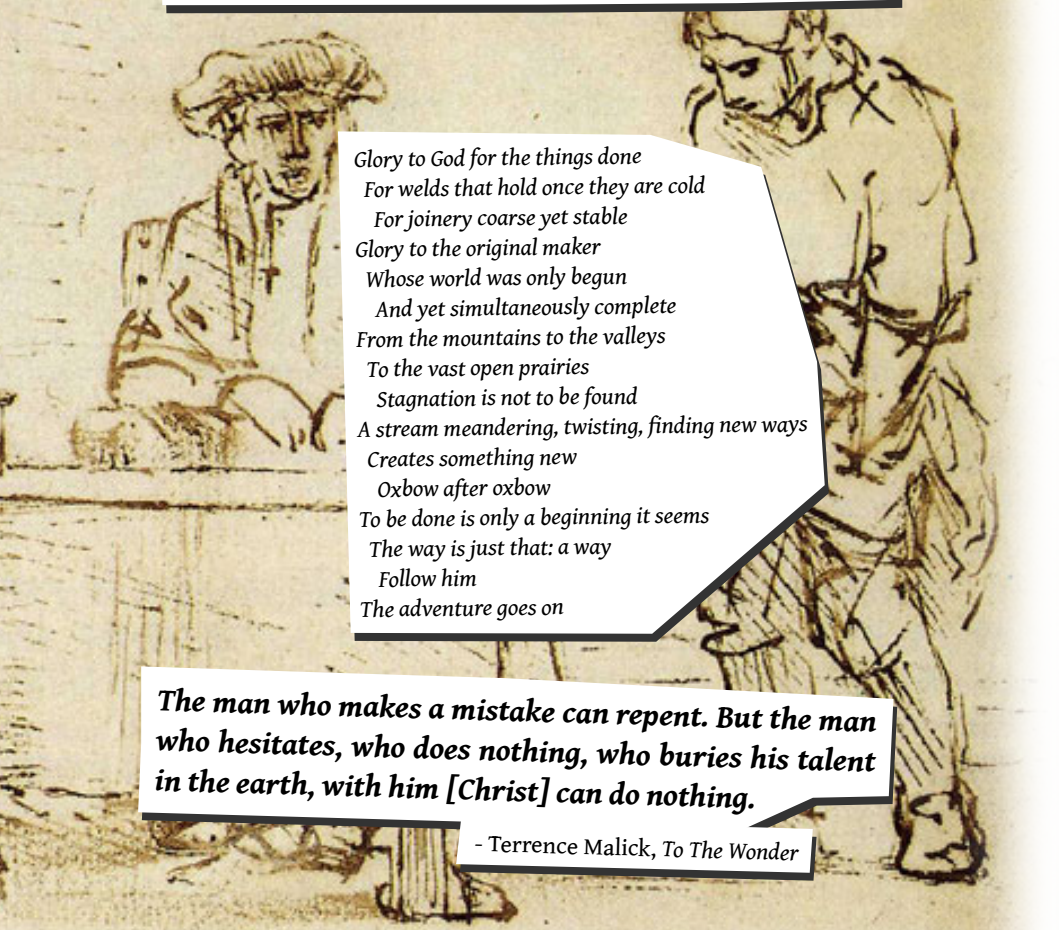
So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

We are given a gift - the gift of life. This is truly a gift - a gift of love.

We can see quite clearly the damnation of the man who did nothing, who buried the talent. The man who does nothing has a fundamentally different relationship than the men who do invest. The man who does nothing is at odds with his master. He is combative. He sees his master's thirst - and detests it. He sees his wrath and trembles to the point of inaction. The others, though, share in the master's joy.

We do not see what the master would have done if his servants had invested and lost money, but we can look to other parables - such as that of the prodigal son - and speculate. This son squandered what he was given. And perhaps he does not make full repentance - but he returns, no less.

And with that return - with our action - with our mistakes - God works.

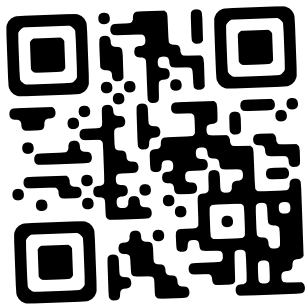


*Glory to God for the things done
For welds that hold once they are cold
For joinery coarse yet stable
Glory to the original maker
Whose world was only begun
And yet simultaneously complete
From the mountains to the valleys
To the vast open prairies
Stagnation is not to be found
A stream meandering, twisting, finding new ways
Creates something new
Oxbow after oxbow
To be done is only a beginning it seems
The way is just that: a way
Follow him
The adventure goes on*

The man who makes a mistake can repent. But the man who hesitates, who does nothing, who buries his talent in the earth, with him [Christ] can do nothing.

- Terrence Malick, *To The Wonder*

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*Envisioning Technology
through the
Mind of Christ*

