

Episode 230

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast, so occasionally I like to have a guest on to discuss a particular topic. Often that's an author, and that's the case today. Joining me today is Russ Ramsey. He's the author of the new book, *Van Gogh Has a Broken Heart*. And what most intrigued me about this possibility is that very different than the other interviews we've had in terms of the topic. His book is a lot about art and its meaning, and what Christians can learn from it, and even some of the apologetics. Well, we can learn about God through art. Definitely a very different topic than what we've covered in the past. At Got Questions, we do receive quite a few questions related to art and so I'll be asking Russ both about his book and also some of these questions. So stay tuned to the end for some of those questions, but Russ thank you for joining me today.

Russ Ramsey

Yeah, it's good to be here.

Shea Houdmann

Let me ask you first for us to tell our audiences a little bit about yourself and what led you to write, *Van Gogh Has a Broken Heart*.

Russ Ramsey

Well, I am, I'm a pastor in the Nashville area, married with five kids, and I have been a lifelong layman student of the arts, so I was never a an art major in college or anything like that. But I've been paying attention to art for as long as I've been in middle school. I think I had an art teacher who told us that if we want a lifelong appreciation with the arts, we should find an artist that we connect with and just pay attention to them through the rest of our days and they'll introduce us around to their friends and inspiration and and we'll learn more about them. And that's been the case for me with Van Gogh and then some others. And so I've been just, I I

come from a farming community in Indiana. I come from a storytelling people I come from, people who kind of learn a lot by way of story, which is kind of how people are right that it was Jesus primary method of teaching was storytelling and parables. And as a pastor, I'm a storyteller in a lot of the work that I do from the pulpit and in writing and otherwise. And so for me, kind of the merging of the being a storyteller and thinking about the origin of some of the world's great art, and then the people who made it and the stories of the people who made it has always been something intriguing to me. And as I began to kind of get in to trying to understand like why why was this painting made? What what? What's the story behind this sculpture? I just found that most of the time it was a very fascinating tale to unpack. And so I have been doing that for a while. And these books are kind of the fruit of of that.

Russ Ramsey

My hope is to present the subject matter of art in a storytellers voice, in a way that kind of eliminates those feelings, or at least helps eliminate those feelings of insecurity that I think a lot of people feel when it comes to engaging with art. That somehow if I don't have a background in art criticism or art history, I'm just not going to get it. And I think art at its core, especially great art, is just really good storytelling. And so that's what the book is, is, it's, it's just storytelling with art as kind of the subject to talk around a whole lot of other things related to the human experience, that things that everybody goes through, particularly in this book, related to suffering.

Shea Houdmann

For sure I, I'm not a arts aficionado myself. I can definitely recognize a beautiful art. I think I probably would say I prefer photography like over like paintings, but I've seen some amazingly beautiful paintings before. Some artists I appreciate more than others. I prefer something be a little more realistic than some of the like a Van Gogh where a lot of their paintings it's like, what is this person thinking? What are you trying to communicate through something like that. But a quote in your book that I found particularly interesting, you say much

of the world's great art comes from places of sadness and I believe that's often why we connect with it. The artists bring their personal experience to the work to say something meaningful about the world, to the viewer. So how is that the case? And what are some, maybe some really poignant the examples of that that you've seen in art?

Russ Ramsey

Well, I think one of the poignant examples for me is Van Gogh's entire body of work. Like I when I think of Van Gogh, I don't think of a particular painting. I don't think of starry night or the sunflowers. I really think of him and then the work that he gave in much the same way that a person might feel about, you know, a songwriter like Bruce Springsteen or Paul Simon. Where you know it's a body of work as opposed to just a song. And Van Gogh one of the things that is a through line for him is that he lived a life that was filled with this quest for beauty. Being in the presence of beauty, capturing beauty, communicating beauty to others, mixed with a life that was filled with a lot of sadness and torment. And so there there's a sadness that runs throughout his work. And even the title for the book comes from a letter that he wrote to his brother about a painting of a bridge in France. It's just an iron bridge going over a river and he's describing it to his brother. He's describing the color of the water and the sunset in the background and the silhouettes of the people on the railings. And then at the end of that description, he says I'm trying to get it something utterly heartbroken and therefore utterly heartbreaking. And there's an element of sadness just in the way that he arranges his compositions and colors, that whether you studied composition and color, it's an experience that that many people have when they spend time with his work.

Russ Ramsey

I just taught taught a second grade class about Van Gogh and we looked at some of his paintings and I asked them after I'd shown a few paintings of, you know, just landscape type of things, the sunflowers and a river at night, feeling like, what are some of the feelings you feel like inside of you when you look at his work? And a couple of the kids were quick to say I feel a

little sad. And I think that that a lot of the art that is kind of gathered up and retained in museums is part of the reason that it's so important for so many people is it's either asking a a question that is fundamental to to the human experience, or it is making a statement about what is fundamental to the human experience. And a lot of it has to do with tragedy navigating hardship. The the complicated relationship between beauty and grief. And so, so much of the so many of the paintings that we that we know and and celebrate and flock to museums to see are in some way connected to the that human ache to be to be known and to understand our purpose and to be secure and at peace in the world and loved. And so Van Gogh's one who does that for me.

Russ Ramsey

The way that Rembrandt composes his return of the prodigal son is another one of those paintings where it is just a story that unfolds in front of you in a single frame where you see broken relationships being healed and relationships of close proximity being distance coming into those between the father and the elder brother. And art just has this way of kind of getting past the gates of our defenses and and into into the realm of those places where we think and we feel and it converses with us in that way. And so I think that's that's that's a lot of the art that I'm particularly drawn to is is of that nature for sure.

Shea Houdmann

I think there's something about art that I'm not, I'm not great at explaining it. I'm not great at quantifying it. If you take me to an Art Museum and ask me what would this painting say to you, I probably would not come up with anything close to what the artist intended. But some sense is that's kind of the beauty of art. But what intrigues me most about art, especially well done, art, is that it to me, it communicates something about how God designed us in his image and therefore communicate something about God. So how does art do that? And what do you think art art is ultimately communicating about who God is, what he is like, and then what he is instilled in us as his image bearers?

Russ Ramsey

Yes. Well, if, as as human beings being the the part of creation that's made in his image, one of the things that's kind of inherent in even that is that that God is a maker, that he is a creator and part of our bearing, his image is that we then to are creators and we're makers. We're sub creators I think was the term Tolkien used. You know that we we that we go and we create things out of nothing or out of the we never create anything ultimately out of nothing but we but we make something that wasn't there before out of the things that we find. And out of our minds and out of the resources. And that is a way that we imitate being made in the image of God. We're reflecting God as the creator in the way that we express. And then we do so, so much of the creation like of of great art is creation with the intention of declaring truth. And so when the Lord filled the world in the way that he did when he created the sun, moon, and stars, when he separated night from day, when he made all the animals and the vegetation, and he and he separated land from water, you know that part of the nature of all of those things happening is that we now give up our vacation days to go and behold those things. You know, we, we we will travel halfway around the world or across the country to go stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon or to venture into some jungle or to, you know, stand on the north, the cliffs of Northern Ireland, and to look out across the sea. And and to behold the splendor of something that conveys to us and communicates to us that there must be a maker, and the maker must be filled with splendor.

Russ Ramsey

And so when we then create and, and by the way, those are things that God did not have to make them that way. He didn't have to make a sunset colorful. He didn't have to make the spectrum of colors that we see. He he chose to. He chose to make you know, he chose to make even our bodies be be the kinds of of intricate organisms that shed tears when we feel overwhelming sorrow. He didn't have to make us that way. Sorrow could have just been for us, data in our mind. And yet he made us to be people who physiologically react and respond and

feel in ways that are more than just binary. But they're they're they're holistic with, with all of our our senses.

Russ Ramsey

And so when we then create art and we try to engage in the same kinds of things where we try to say something true, we try to say something beautiful. We try to say something good. When we get into that, that business of trying to express that and communicate to another person something that we believe is ultimately of importance and great meaning for them, we are imitating the way that God interacts with us and thereby also learning better how God interacts with us, you know. And so I'm thinking even of of, you know, I'm in my early 50s now and I've been a person who has been been reading my Bible now for 35 years. And. I read it very differently now. Not theologically necessarily, but there are things that I see on the page and things that I understand about the text that I'm reading because I've spent 33 decades with it, you know. And and over time you grow in this in this insight and familiarity and understanding of the way of the land and the terrain that is something that is also a part of, you know, kind of engaging with the returning to the work of reading the creative work of reading and thinking that moves you deeper into your relationship with the Lord just by the act of practicing over and over again walking with him.

Shea Houdmann

Art can truly have a powerful impact. I think that's part of something that God has instilled in us. I'd look at in scripture like you were just talking about some of the examples of we we could describe as art, whether it's descriptions of the new heavens and the Earth. In Revelation 21-22, we've got streets of gold, we've got Pearly Gates, we've got jewels description everywhere. Even something darker story, so Ezekiel 28, whether that's the king of Tyre or whether that's a figurative description of Satan, that's describes him a beautiful picture. So God understands his beauty. He didn't have to as you said make his creation beautiful, but he chose to. Then he chose us, chose to give us the ability to recognize it. So God is definitely

an artist in that sense. And he instilled that same thing in us to varying degrees in in different areas. And there's some people are so naturally, artistically talented that it blows me away. But they can't do some of the things that I can do very well. The type of things that I'm really good at creating. So we're all creators because we're in God's image. But what we specifically create very significantly from one person to another.

Russ Ramsey

Yeah. Yeah, I think that that's you know, we are all by, by definition, creative beings. I think sometimes people use the word creatives to describe people and kind of mean it specifically to to people who make poetry or music or art or paintings or things like that. But but I mean cooking, managing a home, raising a child, landscaping a lawn? There are so many. Everything we do is is an art. You know, every every teacher is in some way an art teacher, whether you're teaching math or geography or English literature, you're you're teaching students the craft of learning. You're teaching them the art of comprehension. And you're teaching them the the subtlety of nuance in all of those things that are just part of the artistic process.

Russ Ramsey

And I think another reason for writing these books is I really, I really want to try to dismantle some of the the tall fences that people put around the arts and creativity when it comes to how they regard themselves is is I think this isn't a book just for people who are interested in the arts. My hope is that actually, it's a book that is interested for people who are who are interested in understanding the human experience and grief and sorrow and suffering and love a good story, and along the way, art will be the subject matter that is used. But but the the stories are about so much more than just that because because we are, I don't know, we're actively we're actively learning to to navigate this world and it takes a lot of of creativity which the Lord is imbued in all of us.

Shea Houdmann

Just the other day I was looking at a large blank wall and it's like, that's, it really struck me as how weird that looked. It's like there shouldn't be just a large blank wall. That wall needs something. Whether it's a different color or it's an accent. Whether it's a some art on the wall, it needs something. It's like something in me was like, that's not how it's supposed to be. Then you look at nature out there, how God created things and there's there's color, there's variance, there's differences. Creative aspect to me, I'm not an artistic creator, I do recognize the beauty that God has instilled in his creation. When I see something man-made that's holds no beauty to it, it's functional, so to speak, I'm like, that's something in me says that's not how it's supposed to be. There should be something else in that. And to me, that's just again a powerful reminder of God's creativity.

Russ Ramsey

Yeah, I just. I spent some time with one of my kids over in Italy last May, at the end of May and beginning of June where you know, their cathedrals and basilicas, everywhere you turn and adorned with sculptures by people like Michelangelo and Donatello, you know, just kind of, you know, in the breezeway. You know and and and then over here as a pastor, you know, in in the states. We we we were very much, I think for financial reasons and other we we are we are form over function or or function over form more, more and more it seems like. You know that that the the architecture over there is intended to put a person in a in a posture of awe and reverence. And here it's it's trying to just keep costs as low as as we possibly can for for having open doors.

Shea Houdmann

I mean, not everything needs to be the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, right to you ever been to some monasteries where it's wall to wall everything has art on it or portraying scenes from the Bible so forth. It's like that's.

Russ Ramsey

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Shea Houdmann

Amazing at the wrong place that can be overwhelming. You come across a little like, OK, that's too much. But done tastefully, it can have a a powerful impact for sure. One of the things you talk about in your book that I definitely appreciated was how I mean, you mentioned you mentioned already briefly how art is a powerful way of expressing emotion. An artist can express emotion in what he paints and how he or she paints it, but then also people who view that are supposed to understand what is being expressed. And so for you, how does art, how is it particularly good at expressing emotion? And even causing emotion?

Russ Ramsey

Well, I think I think one of the ways that I would I would say that happens most often when people engage with a painting, for example, is when you, when you walk up to a painting we use, we use Rembrandt's return of the prodigal son as an example earlier, that when you stand in front of a painting done by a masterful artist they will make you involuntarily look at the painting in a certain sequence. Your eye will go one place first, and then it will go someplace else, and then it will go to a third place. And sometimes, even though the masters will make your eye go to a fourth place in a in a very certain sequence. And so what ends up happening is you've kind of looked at 4 pictures rather than just one. You've you've kind of you've taken in a sequence of events. And what they've done is they've told you a story. And so when you walk up to the return of the prodigal son by Rembrandt, you are immediately looking at the the brightest place on the canvas, which is in the middle, down to the, to the left, a little bit of of the exposed, the ragged back of the returning son in the in the embrace of his father. And that's the first thing you see is you see this embrace. And so you see a tender moment between a desperate son and a grieving father, and it's perfect, and it's beautiful, and it's broken, and all of that. And then from there, your eye trains as the father is looking down to the older brother who is standing at a distance next to them. So that's the next place your eye goes. And you see him and all of a sudden the the harmony of the picture and the warmth of it is now has now been given a a

break of coldness. And there's this elder brother who is looking disapprovingly on the generosity and the grace and the love that his father is showing to this other son. And then from there, so you've got this, you've kind of got this triad of people. One father, two sons, both both relating to the father in very different ways. Both abandoning the father in very different ways.

Russ Ramsey

And then from the from the older brother next to him over over his right shoulder is another face, and then another, and then another, and they get deeper into the shadows as you go. And so there it's this kind of audience of people who are connected in varying degrees of closeness to what's happening. And so emotionally, when you take in that scene, you are you are involuntarily looking here they're they're there and then you are finding yourself in the work. And so you're having to consider in this parable, if you if you're familiar with the parable, you're having to consider which one am I? Am I somebody who's on the outside of looking in on this kind of thing, or am I the one who is standing in frustrated superiority over the whole display? Am I the the son in this picture who has returned, who's just desperate and glad to be in the arms of a father who welcomes me back? Or am I in a situation in my life where when I look at this painting, I'm kind of the father in this in this picture, where it's where it's on me to receive somebody back and knowing that that grace extended is going to be frustrating somebody else who who wishes that there was some other kind kind of of consequence. And so you kind of have to go through this place of locating yourself in this scene that is full of human drama and human brokenness.

Russ Ramsey

And that's just one example of how our emotions get entangled when we look at a picture. But other painters do it with color. Other painters do it with just kind of striking scenes. I think of Michelangelo's, David, as another great example of this, where when an artist sits down to render a scene, particularly a biblical scene, he's having to work with a text that is already written and the story is already there. And so if you want to make a story that is and call it, you

know David and Goliath, but you make Goliath small and you make David big, it doesn't work because everybody knows well, that's not the story. You have to actually stick to the story that is given to you. But then you choose as an artist. OK, So what part of the story do I want to tell if I'm only telling it in one still frame or one statue? And most sculptors up to the time when Michelangelo and even after when he made his sculpture of David, when they would portray David, they would portray him after his victory. They would portray him you know, with Donatello has a bronze sculpture of of a young David with his with the head of Goliath at his feet. But Michael, but Michelangelo chose a very different way to go about it. And that is he chose to to depict David before the battle. But like, right as it was about to happen. And so he captures David in this moment of the highest moment of tension in the whole thing where he is standing. And by the look on his face, you can tell he's looking at the giant. Goliath is seconds away from dying, and that's the moment that he captures. And so it's got this energy and this drama that kind of draws you in, where you see. And then he renders him nude, which is another way of kind of just exposing the vulnerability, the utter vulnerability of David to to prevail in these in this battle that he's he's going into. And then in this in this beautiful kind of irony, Michelangelo makes his statue of David, 13 feet tall, 4 feet taller than Goliath was, you know, in in, in the scripture. So the and so David actually is a giant to stand in front of.

Russ Ramsey

But all of those things kind of factor into when you stand in front of it, it's why looking at images online, particularly of statues, is not the same as standing in front of it in person because you're seeing not just the story being told and the way it's being told and the moment that's being captured, but then you're also like wondering about the man with the hammer and the chisel giving the time and attention and focus to creating this thing and what is going through his mind as he is trying to tell us the story in this particular way. And it ends up being, you know, it's it's not just a, a curiosity or a fascination. There is an emotional spiritual component to it that's evidenced by the fact that if you want to go see Michelangelo's David, you

have to order your tickets online if you want to get in. And you have to order them weeks in advance because people all over the world have recognized that this is a statue that they want to be in the presence of. And that speaks to so much more than just technical achievement. It speaks to a transcendental quality of the story being told through the existence of the sculpture and the way that it tells the story. It's it's, it's amazing.

Shea Houdmann

I've I've I've been to Florence and I've seen the the statue up close and along with the many other statues that are in Florence and it's truly amazing both the talent and the skill and even like of some very familiar with the story of David and Goliath and just hearing you just talk, I was like, I don't think I've ever thought about, OK, what event?

Russ Ramsey

Yeah.

Shea Houdmann

Specifically, as this is before the victory is that after I mean what exactly where in the storyline is this? Now that you mentioned that I'm like, yeah, I assuming you're correct, but also from what I remember seeing of it, that's looks right to me. But he's actually.

Russ Ramsey

Yeah, he still has, he still has the stones and and the sling, yeah, in his hand.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah. So that actually leads me perfectly into the number one question we get on Got Questions about art. So you ready?

Russ Ramsey

Hmm.

Shea Houdmann

You probably already guess who I'm going. The number one question we receive is how should a Christian view nudity in art? Obviously I have heard people describe the question is

like at what point does nudity and art become pornography? And there's the saying, well, you know, when you see it, but that's somewhat subjective. So how would you answer that question is? What about nudity in art?

Russ Ramsey

I would say, I think the question that you have to ask is what is the story that is being told? Is it the story that is being told a story of unwarranted sexual gratification or voyeurism, or is the story being told of people you know. You know the human body is how God initially made us is was with no with no covering. And there's there's an element of nudity, particularly in like, I think Renaissance art in particular, where you have a lot of the Sistine Chapel ceiling is a great example of that where there's a lot of of exposed genitalia and exposed breasts and and skin that is there to, to kind of present humanity as one thing rather than it separates the wealthy from the poor. It separates the the, it clearly identifies the men and the women. It's it is, it's something that is how God looks upon us. And so there's there's kind of a sanctity and the depiction of the human form.

Russ Ramsey

And I think that I think it's important for us to also kind of keep in mind that we we we all live in a cultural moment where we we think about the human form and an an uncovered human form in particular ways because of the rampant existence of things like pornography. But for for much of history, when it comes to regarding Renaissance art, it was not scandalous at all to paint a nude figure. People would hang them in their homes, people would hang them. They're they're prominent in museums still. And so I think I think there's a part of just is what the artist is telling praise worthy good, right? You know the things that we're supposed to think on? Or is it something that is intended to lead us into sin? Is it intending to lead us into sin? And is it for the purpose of besmirching the glory of the image bearers of God? Or is it being used as a way of kind of holding forth the beauty of being an image bearer of God.

Russ Ramsey

And I think that's something that as viewers of art it really is a challenge for us to deal honestly with our own hearts as we regard it is to say, is there something in me that that would discredit all forms of nudity and art? And what is it inside of me that would do that? And is that thing inside of me that would say it's it's, I'm going to discredit all forms of art that contain nudity. Is that honoring to God because he sees us with incredible transparency? And to truly love and know another person, we see them with greater and greater transparency too. Even though we it's metaphorical, we we we see each other more, more deeply and more intimately the deeper our friendships go, even.

Russ Ramsey

And so I I would say I I think that that is a, I think that it would be a problem where where. bringing on ourselves, if we're saying this needs to be a question about all nudity and art. But I think the question we have to ask is, is this piece of art telling us something true or is it lying to us? Is it, is it honoring the human form, or is it defiling the human form? And even if it is defiling, the human form, is it defiling the human form in a way that the story it is trying to tell or the statement is trying to make is import. Like Dante's Inferno, Rodens sculpture the Gates of Hell, which has the thinker which is the guy sitting, you know, with his hand on his chin, he's nude. That is Dante. That's who that thinker is. He's Dante, and he's sitting over this giant sculpture. When you see it in its in its context, it's over a giant sculpture of doors called the Gates of Hell, in which unclothed bodies and souls are being dragged into eternal punishment, and that's certainly a defiling of the human form. But it's also a warning against disobedience to the Lord.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent answer. I mean I it's one of those things where if your mind is already prone to think dirty, you can see something and make it dirty even when it's not. So beauty is the eye of the beholder. And to an extent to answer that question is obviously someone who's struggling with a overcoming upon addiction. I would strongly advise them to even stay away from nudity

and art. That doesn't mean the nudity and art is actually wrong in and of itself, but it's just another reality of the world we live in that we're we're all messed up and all have our our issues and need to be careful with that sort of thing. But no, I I'm pretty sure I entirely agree with you on the needing art as much as I know people who take it way too far that they say any new reading art is automatically sinful, and I'm like.

Russ Ramsey

Yeah.

Shea Houdmann

I I agree that there's risk to it. Could I ever paint or draw something like that? I seriously doubt that I could, but I would not automatically say every artistic rendering of nudity would necessarily be wrong depending on the context, depending on the purpose, depending on what's being portrayed and for what reason. But maybe this let me close this one question that's related to this. What I when I see an artist like Van Gogh or some others, how much of art I think portrays the human condition in the sense that of the Van Gogh apparently did not know the Lord, based on what I know of him and his art act portrays like a almost like a, you can correct me on this, but like a warped view of how the world looks. Everything he's seeing is not does accurately resent the the order and the design that God has instilled in the universe. So in what sense is some art that you see display a acknowledgement of the human condition that there's something wrong with the world and only through Christ can that answer be found in the salvation we can experience in him.

Russ Ramsey

Yeah, I think one, I think I would disagree with you on Van Gogh. I I think he had a very complicated relationship with the church, but he he has left behind thousands of letters in which he talks extensively about the Lordship of Christ. His life was a paradox. He was a person who drank too much, visited brothels, did things that we would say these are not Christian activities at all. I imagine that the Kingdom of heaven will be populated with people who have done far

worse than Van Gogh did in his conduct because of the reach and the extent of the grace of Jesus Christ to atone for sin.

Russ Ramsey

But I think you know, I think that that for me, what I'm looking for when it comes to art that makes known the glory of Christ is not as a Christian art or secular art but is it honest art or lying art. You know, is telling the truth about something, or is it or is it deceiving us? And I think of a of a painter named Edward Hopper who hated God. He was a he was a person who was very anti religion in any way and fiercely committed to kind of this individualism and very proud man. And he painted these paintings of New York City, Nighthawks is his most famous one. It's the best cafe at night that has four people sitting around a counter. But his paintings are just filled with loneliness, and they're filled with the kind of loneliness that if you spend a lot of time with his work, you just start to hurt inside, over over the sadness of just people who have nobody else in their life. And that ache, which was something that he was trying to make a comment about, that ache, is actually a biblically true ache. Right? Is that is that in this world, unless we understand that our lives have meaning because we're made in the image of God and there is a creator who loves us and made us for himself. If you take all of that away and all that you're left with is a godless world where all we can do is achieve and succeed, it is going to be a very lonely existence. And that's how he lived. And that's the truth that he painted in his canvas. I don't agree with him, but it's the fact that he was painting the the consequence of rejecting God with such clarity that makes it true. Does that make sense?

Russ Ramsey

And so I think I think for for you know, there are a lot of great artists out there who we look at and say, well, these are the people that I would gravitate toward because they painted great biblical scenes. But then when you start to investigate their lives, like Rembrandt is a perfect example of this, where Rembrandt has some of the most profound biblical, visual, biblical exegesis, that you'll get out there. And he also had multiple wives and he mistreated

women and he abused money and he you know, he he was he was a person who and he and he died in obscurity and and and kind of alone. And and yet when Psalm 139 when the Lord knit these people together in their mother's wombs and brought them into this world and said there's not a single day that will come for you that I don't know about and haven't ordained, part of the, part of the work of these individuals would be to create these art that would hang in our museums, that then we would go visit and look at and say, what does this tell me about living in this world, such as it is and what does this tell me about the stories of Scripture? And so I think that when the art that I find most God honoring and most instructive to my soul is art that I look at, and I think this person was trying really hard to say something as true as they possibly could about the world. And if they're, if they're lying, if they're just telling me something, that's like it's categorically, theologically, just false, then I don't have much use for it. But if they're trying to depict the sadness and the brokenness of the world, because their lives are completely shattered by sadness and brokenness and sin, then there's use in those those paintings for instructing our hearts and things that are noble and good and true. And so that's what I'm looking for is I'm looking for what, what art is telling me the truth about what it means to be alive in this world and what it means to have a God who is glorious and redeeming.

Shea Houdmann

That's absolutely right. I I look at art and even when I'm not 100% sure what it's portraying, I love it when art accurately represents what's what's true and what what the condition is of the human heart.

Russ Ramsey

Yeah.

Shea Houdmann

And what obviously as a dedicated Christian art that portrays biblical scenes well or biblical truths, well, it's definitely going to be my favorite. But even some of the arts you spoke of that.

Russ Ramsey

Yeah.

Shea Houdmann

I recognize the beauty in that when it speaks the truth and this points people to there's something wrong with this world. I mean, whether that's just the recognition of loneliness or so to be on that to the point of actually recognize your need for Savior, I you're 100% recognized that art can reach different people and reach people in different ways than other mediums can. For that, I'm very grateful and appreciate the tremendous work that's been done.

Shea Houdmann

So. So Russ the title of your book Van Gogh Has a Broken Heart. It's a topic that a lot of Christians I don't know are all that familiar with, and I think it's something a lot of Christians should know a lot more about. So just briefly, obviously the the point of this episode of the podcast is not just to get people to buy your book, but who's the book for and who do you think would find your book particularly interesting?

Russ Ramsey

If you are navigating a particularly difficult or sad season, if you are grieving, if you are experiencing profound loss and trying to see beauty, trying to remember how to see beauty in the world. This book is written for you. If you're, if you're somebody who feels like there's just been a catastrophe that's happened in your life and and you wonder if there's hope, these are sad stories that are about beautiful, beautiful things. And so that was, that's the idea for me is is this is for people who are walk. Particularly people who are walking through seasons of sorrow to find hope in the Lord by way of stories about art and scripture.

Shea Houdmann

Fantastic. So yeah, we'll include links to where you can purchase Van Gogh Has a Broken Heart in the show notes podcast channel@podcast.gotquestions.org also on YouTube when this video goes live. So Russ thank you. I truly enjoyed this conversation. This book is it's

it's it's excellent. And like I said, it's a topic that a lot of Christians are not all that familiar with and I think Christians as a whole could learn more from art and learn to appreciate art than more than we typically do. So keep doing what you're doing, and may God use this book for his glory and use it to encourage people who are struggling with the broken heart, as you said.

Russ Ramsey

Thank you so much. Thank you so much Shea.

Shea Houdmann

This has been the Got Questions podcast with Russ Ramsey, the author of Van Gogh Has a Broken Heart. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.