



The Bible blackout

A new devotional practice for a remix culture

Everyone likes Sharpie markers, right? I know I do. I always keep a Sharpie with me, because I never know when I'm going to want one. But it had never occurred to me to use a Sharpie to make art. Not until I started reading and hearing about Austin Kleon.

In his one-line bio, Kleon says, simply, "I make art with words and books with pictures." I recently read his book *Show Your Work!*, where he talks about creating art (or music or anything else, really) and the importance of having others join you in that process.

But what I find really fascinating about Kleon are his newspaper blackouts (newspaperblackout.com). He takes copies of the *New York Times*, grabs a Sharpie, and begins to circle some words, cross out others, and color over paragraphs until he's left with a new creation: a transformative piece of art. He takes prose and turns it into poetry. He takes something created . . . and creates something new.

You've probably heard about the biblical idea that humanity is made in the image of God, which can mean different things depending on whom you talk with. One obvious way we are made in the image of God is that we are creators: we naturally like to create things. We don't often get the chance to create something *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) like God did, but we do have the opportunity to create out of what's already there.

You see this practice of reinvention everywhere. Whether it's a mash-up song performance on the TV show *Glee*, a video of funny YouTube clips spliced together, or these newspaper blackouts, we are a culture that mashes things up, remixes media, and seeks to be creative with the already created.

When Kleon creates his newspaper blackouts, he is looking at a text and seeing what jumps out at him. He may not know exactly why each letter, word, or phrase stands out to him until he has completed the blackout.

In many ways, this is similar to the spiritual practice of *lectio divina* (divine reading). And so, as I was looking through Kleon's newspaper blackouts, I wondered if I might be able to do a mash-up of my own, combining his blackouts and *lectio divina* to create a Bible blackout.

I grabbed a Bible, photocopied a random passage from Leviticus 16:1-3, took up my Sharpie, and started

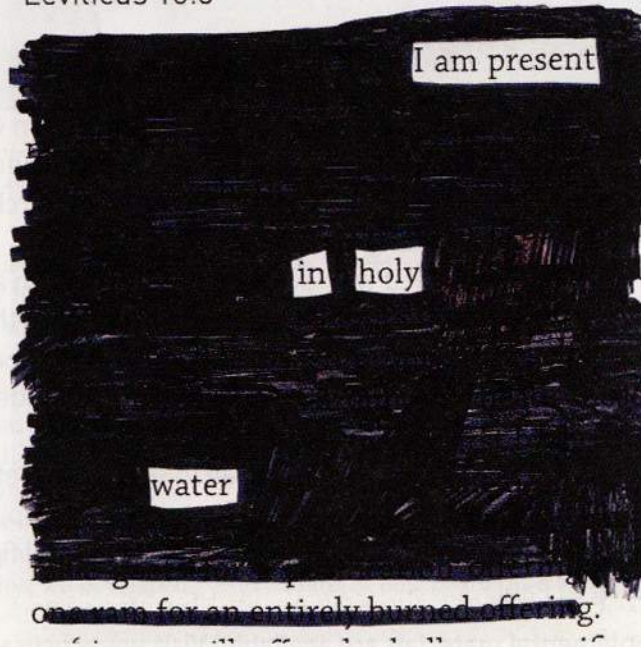
crossing out words. Some thought it was a bit sacrilegious at first, but I think it's just a visual way of doing *lectio divina*.

My first Bible blackout, from Leviticus 16:3, produced this text: "I am present in holy water." I also used Psalm 23 for a Bible blackout and came up with this text: "The LORD keeps me alive. I walk and you protect me. You spill faithful love. I will live. I live." I even tried the Bible blackout method of *lectio divina* a few weeks later at youth group, and they really got into it and enjoyed engaging with the Bible in a new way.

What I'm left with, after creating a Bible blackout, is something new: a new interpretation of Scripture and a new piece of art. It's a new thing that God may be trying to say to me through this ancient text.

Who knew that grabbing a Sharpie and a Bible could lead to a new devotional practice?

Leviticus 16:3



Adam Walker Cleaveland's first Bible blackout using a Sharpie, Leviticus 16:3, and a whole lot of imagination