

# Michelangelo's Tortured Years

The famed artist Michelangelo was summoned to Rome by Pope Julius II to work on a painting project.

Michelangelo wanted to refuse the task, which involved painting a dozen figures on the ceiling of a small chapel in the Vatican. Michelangelo was a trained painter, but his true passion was sculpture. When pressed, however, Michelangelo reluctantly accepted the task.

The artist's rivals hoped he would fail in his assignment, knowing that painting was not his first love. But once Michelangelo agreed to do the job, he poured himself into it.

He expanded the scope of the project from a simple depiction of the 12 apostles to include more than 400 figures and nine scenes from the Book of Genesis.

For four agonizing years, Michelangelo lay on his back painting the Sistine Chapel's ceiling. His neck, shoulders, and back ached. Paint dropped into his eyes. His vision was damaged.



Later, Michelangelo would call this time in his life “tortured years” that made him feel “as old and as weary as Jeremiah.”

The fruits of his agony, however, were beautiful and inspiring. Art historians note that artists like Raphael adapted their styles to reflect Michelangelo's influence.

What drove Michelangelo's commitment to excellence and beauty?

Perhaps this incident might give a clue. “No one will ever see this corner of the chapel,” someone on the floor called up to him as he worked one day.

Michelangelo's reply: “God will see.”

Conclusions to be drawn from that response? At least two:

1. Nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.
2. Recognition of what we are called of God to do demands our best – whether or not we receive the praise of others.

*All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty (Proverbs 14:23).*

– Beecher Hunter