

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## Music: A Gift We Discover

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### EXERCISE

Write down any objects that exist in the world that produce musical sounds without our involvement in the creation of those sounds (e.g., wind whistling through the trees, metal pieces clanging together in just the right way to produce a tone, the hiss and plunk of rain falling).

### Introduction

I am a night person. When I was first married, I would stay up late and sleep later in the morning. When I woke, I would hear the sound of the birds singing in the trees and weaving with those notes were the sounds of someone singing in the house. It was my wife, who is a morning person, walking around the house and singing in the day. And it was as if I had emerged onto the shores of a new world and waiting for me was this surprising and beautiful sound I had not looked for and could have never imagined existed. This is an image of how we all are. We have emerged onto the shores of this world and have found the mysterious presence of song and it predates us; it arrests and indwells us. We live in the presence of this gift of music.

### Discussion

#### Music Is a Gift We Discover

Music is God's gift to us. There are many times in the Scriptures where God bestows on his people a gift for their good, but he also expects them to steward that gift for his purposes. Music is such a gift, given to us in love and to be used for his purposes.

#### 1. *God Has Woven the Gift of Music into Creation*

God has woven music into creation and we discover it.

### ILLUSTRATION

Legend has it that Pythagoras of Samos was walking in a marketplace and heard two blacksmiths hammering on their anvils and noticed they made different tones. He began a series of experiments with different lengths of metal strings and discovered how mathematical ratios affect musical consonance. So the instruments we have don't create music; they work as a conduit for the music God has woven into creation. Augustine said, "Beauty is indeed a gift of God but that the good may not think it a great good, God dispenses it even to the wicked." As far as we know, Pythagoras did not know God. Babylonians were discovering some of these things hundreds of years earlier, but even though they did not know their Creator, they were able to see this miraculous order that God has woven into His creation. We live in a world that is full of music.

#### 2. *God Has Given Us the Gift of Music for Pleasure*

One of the most mysterious things about music is the pleasure that it brings us.

### ILLUSTRATION

Music brings us pleasure in many ways. Children sing when they play and dance when they hear music. We drive places and pay money to listen to people make music. We honor those who make music and permit them their eccentric haircuts. We buy each other music. We search it out when we're in our cars or homes. It makes us weep, laugh, and feel brave. It is a gift of beauty, kindness, and sheer delight. It is a presence in a world that could have been otherwise, but isn't.

3. *God Has Given Us Music to Point to Himself*

Like all of creation, music not only gives pleasure, but also has purpose. In fact, like all good gifts of creation, it has at least two purposes: to bring glory to God and to bring good to our neighbor.

a. *Bring Glory to God*

When we find pleasure in God's creation, this brings glory to him because we are responding to it in the way we were made to do. So just our singing in delight is a joy to him and brings honor and glory to him. We also glorify God with music when we focus our music on telling of his greatness and beauty and when we give our music to him as an offering.

## ILLUSTRATION

Psalm 96:1-2, 12-13 says, *Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.... Let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.* The Bible continually tells us to take music and celebrate God with it. Scripture also encourages us to express the whole range of our life with God with a range of musical sounds: *Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!* (Psalm 150:3-5)

b. *Bring Good to Our Neighbors*

The other purpose of music is to bring good to our neighbors. God's commands to his people are summed up as: love God and love neighbor. And all his good creation can and should be used in this work of love.

## ILLUSTRATION

Ephesians 5:1, 2 and 18, 19 say, *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.... Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making*

*melody to the Lord with your heart.* Paul links music to loving each other. We are supposed to encourage one another with this gift. Our discourse with each other is to be leavened with music. We use music to strengthen the church and build the body into wholeness. So music is not only a private delight, but also a public good. This also means conversations about music should be shaped by the acknowledgment that music is a good gift from God. If we keep this in mind, our conversations won't begin with debates over style or attempts to vindicate our own preferences; our conversations about music will begin with gratitude and a humble sense of our responsibility to steward this gift.

Our music should also be a point of communication with our unbelieving neighbors. The music we listen to, write, sing, and play should be music that loves our neighbor in beautiful and accessible ways.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

When we talk about music, do we begin with gratitude to God for giving us this beautiful gift? Do we understand that music is a good gift for our unbelieving neighbor as well?

## Stewarding the Gift

Stewarding music means being skillfully creative with this gift God has given us. J.I. Packer says, "Taste is a facet of wisdom, the ability to distinguish that which has value from that which does not." (*Christianity: The True Humanism*, Thomas Howard and J.I. Packer, p. 165)

## ILLUSTRATION

Exodus 35:30-33 says, *Then Moses said to the people of Israel, 'See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft.* The Holy Spirit falls on us to inspire us to do various skills with excellence. We recognize the value of cultivating a skill in other areas of our lives. We don't want "earnest plumbing" done on our pipes we want excellent plumbing

done. We don't want someone to do our taxes with sincerity, but with skill. So we also need to see music as a valuable skill that can be cultivated and used with beautiful creativity.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Are we finding the people in our congregation whom God has gifted with skill in music to take part in our worship service? Are we providing opportunities for them to grow in excellence in this skill?

instrument in existence. For many of us, this is a daunting prospect. We may only want to express the experiences we have already had in musical forms we are already comfortable with. Many of us come to worship and don't want to think about the needs of those around us. Others of us are fearful of trying something new because we don't believe that God is able to move us in new ways.

But in Revelation 5, we see the fulfillment of God's amazing promise that we will all be singers together. We will be able to use this gift of music, along with all the people who have ever lived, to sing a song that has not yet been heard.

## Lesson

In Christian worship, God teaches us that music is a gift that we discover and steward.  
(Psalm 150)

We see a picture of full worship in Psalm 150 where everyone and everything that has breath is praising God with every kind of music and

## Exercise

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## Discussion Question

1. When we talk about music, do we begin with gratitude to God for giving us this beautiful gift? Do we understand that music is a good gift for our unbelieving neighbor as well?
2. Are we finding the people in our congregation whom God has gifted with skill in music to take part in our worship service? Are we providing opportunities for them to grow in excellence in this skill?

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## Lesson

In Christian worship, God teaches us that music is a gift that we discover and steward. (Psalm 150)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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Father of Jesus,

We commend our hearts to your watchful care. May our words allure others to the highest walk of faith and love. Cause me to be a mirror of Your grace. May our lips be well-tuned cymbals sounding Your praise. Help me to walk as Jesus walked, our only Savior and perfect model. Let our happiness be amongst the poor in spirit; let us always esteem others better than ourselves and find true humility through our union with Christ our Lord. Amen.