

MUSIC THAT LIFTS NOURISHES THE SOUL Ephesians 5:19-20

INTRODUCTION:

Music is the universal language of the ages. Each culture and every generation can be recognized by its music.

I've never known anyone who didn't like music. They may not have liked the music that I like. I may not have appreciated the music that they like. But I don't think I have ever known a person who didn't like music.

Music affects our lives in so many ways. It is a part of our every day existence. Just think of the background music in movies, television shows, commercials, restaurants and other areas, and imagine how they would be without it. And I do not even want to imagine St. Louis Cardinals baseball without Ernie Hays playing the Busch Stadium organ.

But because music is everywhere, we can become deaf to it. We don't listen to it and we don't appreciate it.

There is also an equal but opposite danger and that is that we appreciate music strictly for its entertainment value. Music is capable of far more than just entertaining us. In fact, it may surprise you to know but God intended for music to be a tool He could use.

It was God Who created music and He intends it for our good and for His glory. God intends for us to use music to:

I. **PRAISE (Psalm 98, Psalm 150)**

Psalm 150 is not only the last psalm in the book of Psalms, it is also a very familiar one. And it is a psalm of praise.

Psalm 150

¹ *Praise the LORD.
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.*
² *Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.*
³ *Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,
⁴ praise him with tambourine and dancing,
praise him with the strings and flute,
⁵ praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.*
⁶ *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD.*

That psalm begins with the words, *Praise the LORD* and ends with the words, *Praise the LORD*. Let me teach you a little Hebrew this morning. In

the Hebrew tongue in which this psalm was written, the phrase “Praise the LORD” is Hallelujah. Hallelujah is Hebrew for “praise the LORD.” And God intends for us to use music to praise Him.

Every Sunday, we use music to praise the LORD. When we sing a song “All Hail King Jesus” we are praising him as Lord. When we sing “Glorify Thy Name in All The Earth” we are praising the LORD. Can you think of any song that praises God more than to sing, “*Oh LORD, my God, When I in awesome wonder, Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made; I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, Thy power throughout the universe displayed...How great Thou art!*” Quite rightly did Jack Hayford write, “Majesty, worship His majesty.” Music helps us to praise the LORD and worship His majesty.

Psalm 98 reads:

Psalm 98

¹ *Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things;
his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.*
² *The LORD has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.*
³ *He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to the house of Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.*
⁴ *Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
⁵ make music to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
⁶ with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn—
shout for joy before the LORD, the King.
⁷ Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.
⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;
⁹ let them sing before the LORD,
for he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.*

Can there be any question that God gave us music so we could praise Him?

II. WARN (Deuteronomy 31:19-32:47)

Music is also useful to warn. Before Moses died, God predicted that when he was gone, the Israelites would backslide and turn away from worshipping the LORD. Knowing that the Israelites would not remain

faithful, God did not tell Moses to get them together and preach them a sermon. Or tell them a story. Or write a book for them to read after he was gone. No, of all things, God told Moses that since the people were going to drift away from following after Him, he should write them a song!

This is what Deuteronomy 31 starting in verse 19.

¹⁹ *"Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them. ²⁰ When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their forefathers, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant. ²¹ And when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath."*
²² *So Moses wrote down this song that day and taught it to the Israelites.*

Did you realize that was in the Bible? And if you were to go to Deuteronomy 32, you could read the lyrics of the song that God told Moses to write to warn the people. It is a bit lengthy for me to read it to you this morning but let me recommend it to you. It is beautiful poetry with a chilling message.

In a similar way, we use music to warn. As a little child, I was taught to sing, "O be careful little eyes what you see. O be careful little eyes what you see for the Father up above is looking down with love so be careful little eyes what you see." Another verse said, "Be careful little feet where you go." Another warned, "Be careful little tongue what you say."

Such musical warnings ought not to be reserved for the children. The rest of us should be warned, too. Do you remember that old song that cautioned us not to settle for being almost persuaded?

*"Almost persuaded" now to believe;
 "Almost persuaded" Christ to receive:
 Seems now some soul will say,
 "Go, Spirit, go Thy way;
 Some more convenient day
 On Thee I'll call."*

*"Almost persuaded," come, come today;
 "Almost persuaded," turn not away:
 Jesus invites you here,
 Angels are lingering near,
 Prayers rise from hearts so dear,
 O wanderer, come.*

And then that haunting last stanza:

*"Almost persuaded," harvest is past!
 "Almost persuaded," doom comes at last!
 "Almost" cannot avail,
 "Almost" is but to fail!
 Sad, sad, that bitter wail,
 "Almost," but lost!*

God intends that we use music to warn when warning is appropriate. There is a more contemporary song in our hymnal that reminds us: "People Need the Lord." That is both a timely reminder and a serious warning.

III. REJOICE (Exodus 15:1-21)

God also gave us music so we could use it to rejoice. If a person feels tremendous gladness and great joy, that just has to be expressed. I've seen little kids who were so happy that they jumped up and down or ran around in circles. I've watched people scream and shout at sporting events because they were so happy. I've seen people shed tears of joy. And all of that is fine. I'm not criticizing any of those expressions of gladness. But another way to express joy is through song.

Do you remember when the Israelites left Egypt, God led them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Their exit route eventually took them to the shore of the Red Sea where they were stopped. They were hemmed in by the water in front of them and Pharaoh's army behind them. They were literally between the devil and the deep blue Red Sea.

At God's direction, Moses raised his rod over the Sea and the waters parted so that they Hebrews were able to pass through on dry land to safety on the other side. 2½ million people passed through between the walls of water on either side of them.

When the pursuing army of the Egyptians tried to follow them, the walls of water collapsed and they and their chariots were submerged and the Egyptians and their horses were drowned.

You know the Israelites had to be delighted at their deliverance. Their hearts were overflowing with relief. Moses and the Israelites were not content to weep for joy or shout for joy or jump for joy: they sang a song. Exodus 15 gives the lyrics.

Again, in the interest of time, I will not read all of the words of the song but here is how it begins:

*15¹ Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:
 "I will sing to the LORD,
 for he is highly exalted.
 The horse and its rider*

*he has hurled into the sea.
²The LORD is my strength and my song;
 he has become my salvation.
 He is my God, and I will praise him,
 my father's God, and I will exalt him.*

Our hymnals are packed with songs of joy. We sing, "Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian. Lift up your voice and sing eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ the King." Or "There's within my heart a melody; Jesus whispers sweet and low: 'Fear not, I am with thee; peace, be still,'" In all of life's ebb and flow. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus – Sweetest name I know, Fills my every longing, Keeps me singing as I go." The joy of the Lord will keep you singing for joy as you go. And it should because God gave us music as a way to rejoice.

IV. INSTRUCT (Colossians 3:16)

God also intends that we should use music to instruct or to teach. The apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 3:16, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*" Think of that: we are commanded to teach and admonish one another by means of singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs!

I suspect that some of us know a lot of what we know because we learned it in a song. How many of you have to sing a little song to name the twelve apostles? Or to list the books of the Bible? Songs are powerful tools for teaching.

It was because of a song that I learned that Zacchaeus was only about 4 to 6 inches tall. And that God's love is about that deep and about that wide, too.

It was through the words of a song that I first learned that, at Calvary, "mercy there was great and grace was free" and that "pardon there was multiplied to me." It was because of a song that I realized that one day, "this robe of flesh I'll drop and rise to seize the everlasting prize and shout while passing through the air, 'Farewell, farewell' sweet hour of prayer."

V. COMFORT (Job 35:10, Psalm 42:8, Acts 16:25)

In times of deep despair; in times of tempestuous trouble; in times of abject agony or utter hopelessness, has a song ever come to your mind? I suspect it has and I suspect it has ministered to you.

More than once, while in the midst of sorrow, I've caught myself quietly singing the words, "*Let sorrow do its work, send grief or pain; Sweet are Thy messengers, sweet their refrain When they can sing with me: More love, O Christ, to Thee! More love to Thee, more love to Thee!*" I've

learned to take comfort from the knowledge that the loving Father will never cause His child a needless tear so He will use sorrow, grief and pain to draw me closer to Him.

I've derived comfort from the knowledge that *"His eye is on the sparrow so I know He watches me."* I've been consoled by the reminder that *"There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus. No not one! No not one!"* And I've often joined my voice with that of Mosie Lister to say, *"In the dark of the midnight Have I oft hid my face, While the storm howls above me, And there's no hiding place. 'Mid the crash of the thunder, Precious Lord, hear my cry, 'Keep me safe, 'til the storm passes by...Hold me fast, let me stand In the hollow of Thy hand; Keep me safe 'til the storm passes by."*

When Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi, having been mugged by a mob and then stripped and beaten by the authorities, they were shackled by chains on their wrists and on their ankles. Acts 16:25 tells us that about midnight they were praying and singing hymns to God. I'm sure those hymns did more for them than if they had wasted there energy complaining to their fellow prisoners and shouting at their captors. People, the hard times are going to come. They just are. How should you face them? With a song because it will give your comfort in your darkest hour.

It was Job's friend, Elihu, who spoke of the God who giveth songs in the night. I know that God and I know some of the songs. In Psalm 42:8, the lyricist wrote, *"By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me."*

CONCLUSION:

The Bible says a lot about music and the ways we can sing both to God and about Him. But did you know that the Bible says God also sings to you and about you? I didn't either. Sandy proofread my sermon and said, "That reminds me of the passage that says that God sings over us." I hated to admit that I didn't know what passage she meant so I didn't say much. I just waited until she went to bed and then I did a computer search and found this nugget in Zephaniah 3:17.

*¹⁷ The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing."*

Isn't that an inspiring thought? While we are singing for the Lord, He's singing for us. Hey, why don't we sing along with God right now? Let's rejoice in Him as He rejoices in us.

INVITATION: #147:1,3 – *"How Great Thou Art"*