

Music as Prayer:

Brook Redlin

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Professor Mr. Dorn

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Abstract

Music as prayer allows for numerous points of discussion. This paper will bring in ideas taken from Dr. Thomas Troeger, John Calvin, Louis Berkhoff, and Wayne Grudem and use them to solidify an idea of music as prayer. The paper will also include many scriptural references to incorporate faith integration as well as a view from the Bible on the topic. The paper will cover Dr. Schantz's design for aesthetic excellence. The paper will focus specifically on music of the church and the worship leader's importance.

Finally the paper will look at musical examples and break them down to their foundation. Then the importance is to rebuild them to show how to look for music meet the requirements of music as prayer. Description as far as breaking them down to the elements of which the songs are composed and then looking at them through unity, variety, and fittingness-intensity model.

Music as Prayer

When a song is written, an album is recorded, a choir performs, or an instrumentalist plays a gig, the musician has the potential to be using their music as prayer. Music has the ability to trigger emotions that most other forms of entertainment cannot. When the church prays (by church referring to the church universal) together in agreement, it is an irresistible sound to our Heavenly Father! "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven." (Matthew 18:19). The word "agree" is the Greek word "sumphoneo." This term is where we get the English word symphony from. When people pray together, we are music in the ears of our God. If a person is focused on the scripture, prayer-text or church doctrine the text of a song expresses, then the person begins to internalize the message, God's message, and meditate on the meanings behind the words, the import of the prayer. They open themselves to God's Spirit moving in the music and in their being. Music engages both sides of the brain simultaneously, so when we pray through music we

are literally “giving it our all.” By doing theory and analysis we engage the logical and rational side of the brain, the left hemisphere and by performing the music we are using our intuition and creativity side of the brain, right hemisphere.

This paper will talk about music as prayer. Music is a reflection of our heart. The way we perform or compose music with aesthetic excellence depicts the intentions of our hearts. Praying through song can be an extremely powerful form of prayer, but like any form of prayer it takes practice. Therefore, music that is aesthetically practiced and performed can be as prayer.

Outline:

This paper will start off looking at early church music and the connection it had with prayer. The direction of the paper will then flow into the three concepts associated with aesthetic excellence, unity, variety, and fitting-intensity. A definition of both personal and corporate worship will be discussed. The next topic will identify the enemy to which we do battle with when we consider music as prayer. The paper will also discover what God gives us to combat the enemy, both Holy Spirit and prayer. A transition into a discussion about the purpose of continuous prayer will follow. An account of how God answers our prayers will be established. This will move into the disciplines of a musician and a worship leader. Finally, the paper will explore the purpose of music in worship and finish with a few musical examples.

Early Church Music:

We live in a time when music is seen as a form of entertainment. Our ears are bombarded with music in our cars, on television, in stores, even in elevators. “Dismissive attitudes have generally been based on claims that individual contemporary worship songs are lacking in

theological development, and that contemporary worship merely apes the mores of pop culture, replacing a proper liturgical event with something akin to a rock concert.”¹ We are trained to only listen to the music and not be actively involved in the music. This is not to be taken as an immoral act. Yet, through history, this is not the norm. In ancient times, prayer was originally sung and still is in many parts of the world. If he or she were to go to a Jewish Temple, first they would notice how much of our liturgy grew out of Jesus’ faith-tradition, but then they would notice how much of the liturgy is sung. Most of that music is communal in some form. Not only are we sending our prayers to God, you are doing so with your community. “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I” (Matthew 18:20). The Bible mentions the words “song and “music” frequently throughout its pages. It even becomes more personal when we think about the air we breathe in and out as we sing our praises. We are sharing the air, becoming the wind, the Ruah (Hebrew for wind or breath), becoming “One Body” in the prayer, in the Song of God.

Current Church Music:

The tradition of liturgical music in our church started with chant. But as time has evolved, so has our music. Throughout the last 800 years, more and more modern music has been incorporated into our liturgies and our prayers. In Psalm 33: 1-5 says:

Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright. Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy. For the word of the LORD is upright, And all His work is *done* in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the loving kindness of the LORD...

Here, scripture is commanding us to sing for joy in the Lord. Give thanks to him and sing praises to him with instruments. Sing him a new song that is skillful and shouts the joy of the Lord. For

¹ Stephen Holmes, *The Scottish Journal of Theology: The Constructed Theology of Contemporary Worship Events* (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press 2013) 192

His word is Truth and everything God does is in faithfulness. We do all this through our songs, our worship songs. Music is an elemental sensory experience that awakens a host of metaphors that occur again and again in common speech. We talk everyday about things being “harmonious” or finding “the need to improvise.”²

Listening to a song in a sacred place is not simply enjoyable, but uplifting. We also call this experience “inspiring,” which literally means the spirit being poured into us.³ What does it mean to be inspired? When we are listening to a song we consider to be great, the weary, warring voices that deplete our energy are calmed and the pieces of the worlds in and around us are rebuilt to a new wholeness. When we listen to inspiring music, the profoundest prayers and desires of our hearts feel as if they are lifted upward into the presence of one who responds with descending angels. When we finish listening to a song that brings us to our knees because of how magnificent it is, we often have a new and profound view of reality. We can see dimensions of being that we had been blind to before. There is a wonder, a glory, and a beauty around us that we did not know until the music filled our hearts and minds. We are inspired.

Aesthetic Excellence:

Aesthetic Excellence is a branch of a much bigger idea,

How can a piece have aesthetic excellence? Dr. Schantz talks about how a piece needs to have unity, variety and fittingness-intensity.⁴ “Aesthetic excellence focuses on how raw materials or elements of the arts are used and how they are put together (the form).”⁵ Music needs to have solid cohesion throughout the piece. Beginner music theory classes always start off with building a foundation by using musical elements effectively and efficiently. The scaffold

² Thomas H. Troeger, *Music as Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 2

³ Ibid. 13

⁴ Allen Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible* (Aesthetic Arts Press 2015) 48

⁵Ibid.

theory best fits this scenario. If we want to reach a higher means of knowledge in a field, we must work from the ground up making sure to place supports in weaker areas. Unity is a necessary portion of aesthetic excellence. If the elements of music do not have a sense of unity, then the piece does not match the qualifiers of aesthetic excellence. Being able to unite all the musical elements to be as one is the best way to create unity within a piece.

A piece with aesthetic excellence needs to have variety in how it is composed. Taking a theme or idea and twisting it to give it a unique feeling will ultimately provide unity and sometimes contrast.⁶ A song that has been written more than one verse that intertwines with a chorus, adding a key change, inserting a bridge then going back to the chorus that is *a capella* are ways to add variety. An example of this would be Chris Tomlin's version of Amazing Grace. The song is taken from a traditional hymn written by John Newton. Chris Tomlin takes the song and adds a bridge. The song then repeats going from verse to bridge, but has the option to end on either the last verse or ending on the bridge.

The third concept Schantz mentions is fittingness-intensity. Fittingness-intensity is based on how strong the use of raw musical elements and forms reflect patterns that are built into human experience. How can a composition trigger sets of emotions or feelings to bring a sense of surrender or happiness? Looking at the dramatic shape and intention of the piece is how this can be accomplished. The dramatic shape can be combined with another phrase to add to the overall drama of the piece.⁷ Text painting and word painting are other ways to add to dramatic shape. A personal experience I have had is listening to "Drops in the Ocean" by Hawk Nelson. This band wrote this song as a revelation song of God talking to His Creation and showing them

⁶Ibid. 49

⁷Ibid. 50

how much He loves them, more than the drops in the ocean. The song starts out the intro and first verse with soft, quiet dynamics, only guitar and keys are being played, setting a tranquil feeling. The song starts to build its dramatic shape peering into what we know about God's heart. His heart is an ocean full of His grace, love, and forgiveness. The music demonstrates that by the dynamic levels growing louder. The rhythm is changed in the drums to a syncopated beat to show that God is making a statement of His heart. The musical choices the artist makes changing dynamics, rhythm, and tempo draw a sense of God yearning for us to understand that there is nothing we can do to remove His love, grace, and forgiveness. This song shows amazing dramatic shape and has a relational feeling to it that is created through the musical choices by Hawk Nelson. "Good tunes are easy to sing and remember because they are unified, interesting, and fit the words whereas bad tunes are difficult to sing easily forgettable."⁸

Worship:

We must also establish an idea of worship and what corporate worship is. God is the one who seeks, draws, and persuades us. Worship is our response to the divine initiative. "Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father."⁹ Worship is something that occurs on an everyday basis. "To worship is to experience reality, to touch life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community."¹⁰ It is worshipping the creator, not the world. Authentic worship can only take place in Christ. It is not driven by a liturgy or a call to worship, a change in style or a methodology.¹¹ Worship should matter to us, because it matters to God. When we are worshipping it is always in reply to revelation. Matt Redman says it this way, "As we begin to see the all-deserving worth of God, it

⁸Ibid. 52

⁹Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing 1998) 158

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Harold Best, *Unceasing Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003) 27

produces an all-consuming response in us—every thought, word and deed is submitted in reply to His Lordship.”¹² Worship begins and ends with God who is worthy of all praise, from all people, for all time.¹³ This is worshipping with a price, a living sacrifice. In Ephesians 5:19-20, Paul encourages the Church to “speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God also sings over us. Zephaniah 3:17 tells us that God rejoices over us with singing.¹⁴ When we give more glory to other idols than God, He gets a bit jealous. God wants time spent with Him and when we see a mountain in our life that cannot be climbed by ourselves we give the glory to the One who made it happen. “Only when we have faith in Jesus Christ do we fully possess the image of God and thus can truly understand our own nature.”¹⁵ Worship is our response, both personal and corporate, to God for who He is and what He has done! This is expressed in and by what we say and the way we live.¹⁶ God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

Worship may be personal, but it can also take place with more than one person, in corporate worship. Worshipping God together as one body is what the church is called to do. We are reconnected to God through Christ as well as linked together with one another. Coming together as believers does not mean we have to put away what we have been doing/learning in our personal worship. Instead we should come with transparent hearts to one another and be what Christ intended the church to be. Matt Redman writes, “We cannot choose our path in life, but

¹²Matt Redman, *Facedown* (Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2004) 57

¹³Louie Giglio, *Wired for a Life of Worship* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2006)

¹⁴Tim Hughes, *Here I Am to Worship* (Ventura: Regal Books 2004) 103

¹⁵Emil Brunner, *Main in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Westminster) 64-65

¹⁶ Louie Giglio, *Wired for a Life of Worship* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2006)

we can choose to walk down it with a worshipful trust in the sovereignty and father heart of God.”¹⁷

The Enemy:

We all are familiar with a certain monster that comes to seek, kill, and destroy. Thomas Troeger refers to this monster as the chaos monster. He is everywhere we look. He paper work that piles up on our desk, the numerous honey-do’s that need attention, and the amount of time we get taken away from our quiet time. He is seeking to destroy connection with God, our worship. He is around our families, our work place, and sometimes when we are in our quiet times. He even shows up in the bible! Look at Psalm 74: 6-8,

And now all its carved work; They smash with hatchet and hammers. They have burned Your sanctuary to the ground; They have defiled the dwelling place of Your name. They said in their heart, ‘Let us completely subdue them.’ They have burned all the meeting places of God in the land. Wood and stone are not the only materials that are destroyed. It topples the house of meaning in the human heart, for there is no one around who can interpret what has happened.

The psalm then goes on to explain that there are no more prophets, no one has a sense of time.

The psalmist then tells of a hymn that recollects God conquering the chaos monster at the beginning of creation. Psalm 74:13-14 “You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan.” How many people battling the chaos monster have come to concerts, services, or recitals, and found the music to be the calm in the storm like the psalmist found the hymn to be? This does not subdue the chaos monster. The pulse and timbre of the music put people in touch with the rhythms and structures of creation that belong to God and that resonate in the heart, providing them with a renewed

¹⁷ Matt Redman, *Facedown* (Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2004) 63

sense of divine presence and the strength to endure when the world falls apart.¹⁸ What can counter the chaos monster is Jesus and what Jesus has given to us, the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit:

Dealing with the chaos monster or Satan can be a task that we can never accomplish on our own. Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, and help us do the tasks God has intended for us. In John 14: 15-20 it says,

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

Jesus promises to never leave us. This “Helper” is the Holy Spirit who will do exactly as His title is defined, assist us in every thought, judgement, and action. We must cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Berkhof says,

That man must co-operate with the Spirit of God follows: (a) from the repeated warnings against evils and temptations, which clearly imply that man must be active in avoiding the pitfalls of life, and (b) from the constant exhortations to holy living. These imply that the believer must be diligent in the employment of the means at his command for the moral and spiritual improvement of his life.

Later on in that chapter Jesus, promises us that the Holy Spirit will bring us peace. In John 16: 8-14 Jesus says,

And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative,

¹⁸ Thomas H. Troeger, *Music as Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 5

but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.”

God wants us to eradicate those things in our lives that dissatisfy Him. The only way this is possible is through the Holy Spirit convicting us of our sins. “The Holy Spirit plays an important role in our prayer lives as well.”¹⁹ Romans 8:26-27,

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

The Holy Spirit is involved in our worship. “Ultimately, worship is a spiritual activity and it must be empowered by the Holy Spirit working within us. This means that we must pray that the Holy Spirit will enable us to worship rightly.”²⁰ Being led by this Spirit is easy to identify. Simply look at the actions and attitudes in a person’s life. Galatians 5:22-23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

Prayer:

Worship music is one avenue for glorifying God. We are giving back our breath to Him. Prayer is also an important part of our worship lives. “We should pattern ourselves after Jesus, the complete revelation of the image of God.”²¹ Our prayer and worship are two actions that Jesus taught. Prayer and worship cannot be separated from each other. Prayer in a lot of senses has to have unity, variety, and fittingness-intensity. “When we address the Father in His name,

¹⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 381

²⁰ *Ibid.* 1010

²¹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998) 534

He sanctifies our prayers.”²² Our prayers should be thought to a point that it is congruent with God’s heart. Berkhof uses the hypostatic union to tell us who the object of our prayers is to. “Another effect of the union is that the Mediator just as He now exists, that is, in both natures, is the object of our prayer.”²³ We must then establish what prayer is and what prayer can do. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines prayer as “an address (as a petition) to God or a god in word or thought.”²⁴ This definition does not fully grasp what prayer means when we think of it being in a worship setting. “Prayer is in large part, a matter of creating in ourselves a right attitude with respect to God’s will.”²⁵

Another definition of prayer is “conversation with God, the intercourse of the soul with God, not in thought or meditation, but in direct address to him. Prayer may be oral or mental, occasional or constant.”²⁶ It is a “beseeching the Lord” (Ex. 32:11); “pouring out the soul before the Lord” (1 Sam. 1:15); “praying and crying to heaven” (2 Chr. 32:20); “seeking unto God and making supplication” (Job 8:5); “drawing near to God” (Ps. 73:28); “bowing the knees” (Eph. 3:14). Prayer presupposes a belief in the personality of God, his ability and willingness to communicate with us, his personal control of all things, and of all his creatures and all their actions. John Calvin says that public prayer is of two kinds, “those offered by means of words only and those offered through music. Prayer could also be said through music.”²⁷ Acceptable prayer must be sincere (Hebrews 10:22), offered with reverence and godly fear, with a humble sense of our own insignificance as creatures and of our own unworthiness as sinners, with earnest claim, and with unhesitating submission to the divine

²² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1941) 323

²³ *Ibid.* 403

²⁴ Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2015) <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prayer>

²⁵ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998) 431

²⁶ Louie Giglio, *Wired for a Life of Worship* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2006)

²⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008) 445

will. Prayer must also be offered in the faith that God is, and is the hearer and answerer of prayer, and that he will fulfill his word, “Ask, and ye shall receive” (Mark 11:24), and in the name of Jesus Christ.²⁸ Christ is always praying for us. Barkhof says,

It is a consoling thought that Christ is praying for us, even when we are negligent in our prayer life; that He is presenting to the Father those spiritual needs which were not present to our minds and which we often neglect to include in our prayers; and that He prays for our protection against the dangers of which we are not even conscious, and against the enemies which threaten us, though we do not notice it.²⁹

Continuous Prayer:

We need to have continuous prayer. Things we desire we should “pray through” and believe that God will deliver these requests.³⁰ During times that we find ourselves completely broken and have no place to go, we need to follow the example set before us, Jesus. “Yet there was no despair, for even in the darkest hour, while He exclaims that He is forsaken, He directs His prayer to God.”³¹ Why do we keep praying? Does God have all power? For him to release His power, do we need to pray? Do we bother God enough to get Him to finally release power? Some would say yes to this question, because in Luke 18 Jesus tells about an unjust judge that was bothered, so he did something. The principle of the story is understandable, but God is not an unjust judge. “We come with faith because God’s “kindness and gentle dealing have become known—indeed, have been intimately revealed.”³² When we pray, are we trying to talk God into it? Does God require a certain amount of prayer for certain situations? Do we earn answers to

²⁸ Robert Morris, “Why Keep Praying” (<http://gatewaypeople.com/ministries/life/events/in-jesus-name/sermon/2012/01/28/why-keep-praying> of sermon, Gateway Church, Southlake, Texas, January 28, 2012)

²⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1941) 403

³⁰ Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker* (Austin: Fedd & Company, Inc., 2011) 34

³¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1941) 338

³² John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1995) 68

our prayers? These are important questions to answer when talking about prayer. God has deposited His power in us. Luke 24: 24 says, “And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Acts 1:8: “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” These two passages tie together Ephesians 3:20, “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.” Is God able to do exceedingly, abundantly beyond all that we ask or think? Yes, then why doesn't he? According to the power that works in us, or resides in us. “The word ‘according’ is the Greek word, *kata*, which means to measure out; denotes distribution.”³³ This would then beg the question of how much power are we then distributing to the situation that we need God to work in. Is it possible that God has already done his part by measuring out His power in us and now all we have to do is measure it out and distribute? “Our prayers will also be characterized by reverence. Rather than making demands, we will pray as Jesus did, “Not my will, but thine, be done.”³⁴ God has all power, but his unlimited power is limited in our lives by our prayers.³⁵ “We must release His power through prayer.”³⁶

John 7:37-38 says, “Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.’ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.” This feast that is being talked about is an eight day feast where for seven days they prayed for living water which is based on one

³³ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998) 432

³⁴ *Ibid.* 544

³⁵ Robert Morris, “Why Keep Praying” (<http://gatewaypeople.com/ministries/life/events/in-jesus-name/sermon/2012/01/28/why-keep-praying>) of sermon, Gateway Church, Southlake, Texas, January 28, 2012)

³⁶ Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker* (Austin: Fedd & Company, Inc., 2011) 34

occurrence and one prophecy in the Old Testament.³⁷ When the children of Israel were going through the wilderness and God wanted Moses to speak to the rock, but instead struck the rock one time and water came out of the rock is the occurrence. Zechariah 14:8 prophesies that God is going to flow living water out of Jerusalem again. On the eighth day they prayed for rain. What they did was wrong. They prayed for living water, but if they cannot get living water, they will just take natural water. This was such a religious show at this feast that many of them were drunk and committed immoral acts. When Jesus steps forward on the last day of the feast, He calls everyone who wants to believe to come forward and drink from Him so they might be filled with living water. This he spoke of the Spirit. We receive power as the Spirit comes on you. What is the Holy Spirit going to do? Flow out of our hearts. Since the Holy Spirit is power, how much power is flowing out of us? God has deposited the Holy Spirit in us and we will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us. How much of God's power is flowing out of us? Is it possible that we have our hands on the faucet of God's power in our lives?

Answered Prayer:

“God has nowhere promised to respond to the prayers of unbelievers. The only prayers that he has promised to ‘hear’ in the sense of listening with a sympathetic ear and undertaking to answer when they are made according to his will, are the prayers of Christians offered through the one mediator, Jesus Christ.”³⁸ God adds his fire (power) to our prayers. This is a truth in the bible. If we look at Revelation 5:8, “When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full

³⁷ Robert Morris, “Why Keep Praying” (<http://gatewaypeople.com/ministries/life/events/in-jesus-name/sermon/2012/01/28/why-keep-praying> of sermon, Gateway Church, Southlake, Texas, January 28, 2012)

³⁸ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 378

of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” Bowls full of incense contain the prayers of the saints, which is us. Revelation 8:1-5 says,

When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

When these bowls get full and that incense goes up to the throne of God, there is an angel whose job is to add the fire from the altar, God’s fire, and throw them back down to the earth. This is God sending us the answers to our prayers.³⁹ All we have to do is continue to pray. Harmony lies in our hearts. If we are able to pray to unleash God’s power for what is in our hearts, our desires, and then who is to say that our prayers cannot be a harmonious sound to which we relinquish everything to God according to (denoting distribution) His Will.

Musician’s Practice Discipline:

A musician’s practice ethic is an important key to creating music that is set to draw out the emotions of a congregation because of how aesthetically excellent it is played. We have been taught that practice makes perfect. That is a false statement. Even though we are perfectly made, we will never be able to create something perfect like God has done with us. However, we can still create. “Perfectionism is one of the artist’s biggest battles.”⁴⁰ Trying to make an idea or project perfect can bring down the joy of writing the song. Perfectionists focus too much on the negative and not enough on the positive. Instead of viewing a negative comment as a way to be

³⁹ Robert Morris, “Why Keep Praying” (<http://gatewaypeople.com/ministries/life/events/in-jesus-name/sermon/2012/01/28/why-keep-praying> of sermon, Gateway Church, Southlake, Texas, January 28, 2012)

⁴⁰ Rory Noland, *The Heart of the Artist* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1999) 123

constructive, we can take it too far and do more harm than good. “A perfectionist is guilty of black and white thinking.”⁴¹ It is either all good or all bad. As I was researching this area of disciplined practice, I came to the realization that this type of thinking wrecked numerous hours of practice for making the use of my time unproductive. Perfectionism made my practice pointless because I was reaching for something that I could not obtain. “If people think I’m perfect or better than I really am, they’ll like me and I will be important.”⁴² We tend to reach for expectations that are beyond us and honestly only attainable by God.

Noland has many suggestions for dealing with the perfectionist mentality. We should focus more on the positives and use those to fuel our drive for music instead of all the negative thought.⁴³ That negative thought might be 1 amongst 100 positive encouragements. Some of us may get uncomfortable with celebrating our achievements. “This aspect may seem that we are not giving full credit to God, but rather patting ourselves on the back.”⁴⁴ Savoring is not patting yourself on the back for a job well done. We let God pat us on the back for doing what He’s called and equipped us to do.⁴⁵ Ephesians 4:32 says, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Noland takes this verse that talks about forgiving each other and twists it to focus back on us.⁴⁶ Have we ever thought of taking that verse and applying it to ourselves and the artist who is inside us?⁴⁷ The perfectionist is always criticizing this artist that is inside us not allowing him to grow into what God has anticipated. God loves us so much. He makes that known over and over to us in the Bible. God

⁴¹ Rory Noland, *The Heart of the Artist* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1999) 125

⁴² *Ibid.* 126

⁴³ *Ibid.* 128

⁴⁴ Stephen Holmes, *The Scottish Journal of Theology: The Constructed Theology of Contemporary Worship Events* (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press 2013) 192

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 130

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

acted to glorify Himself as well as show His love for us when He sent Jesus to take our place on the cross.

Instead of pursuing perfectionism, we should look at a similar path of excellence. “Something that is considered excellent is constructive and God-honoring.”⁴⁸ Excellence is giving a perfect effort with the resources that are available. Seven times during the Genesis account of creation, God stands back, looks at what He’s created and says, ‘It is good.’ God values excellence. In the movie *When the Game Stands Tall*, Coach Ladouceur is talking to his players and tells his players this, “We’re not asking you to be perfect on every play. What we’re asking of you and what you should be asking of each other is to give a perfect effort from snap to whistle.”⁴⁹ That is how God views us. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 it says,

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

He does not ask for perfection from us, because He knows we cannot measure up to it. For us to be perfect we would have to be God.

We should not view our practice as making us perfect, but that practice makes us permanent. The times we rehearse or practice needs to be covered in prayer. Being disciplined to take everything that we have and go to the Father is difficult to do. “Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it all ushers us into perpetual communion with the

⁴⁸ Rory Noland, *The Heart of the Artist* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1999) 137

⁴⁹ *When the Game Stands Tall*. United States: Sony Pictures Home Ent, 2014. Film.

Father.”⁵⁰ To pray is to change. Being disciplined in giving time in our lives to seek out God’s heartbeat will bring us closer to His ideas. Our quiet time where it is just us, God, the Bible, and prayer is very precious. “Our highest priority should not be our art.”⁵¹ We must pursue God. We must desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves, to will the things He wills.⁵² When the apostles were being persuaded to place their energies in other important and necessary tasks, they decided to give themselves persistently to prayer and the ministry of the word. When we look at people who explored faith on the frontline, like the apostles, we see that prayer was not a minor characteristic in their lives, it was their lives. Praying that our prayers will make a difference in this world is not a hard task. That ties in with music as we need to pray that our music will make a difference in this world. Whether it is in someone’s life or the revival of a nation who is sleeping, the limits of our music are endless when we keep God involved in the process.

Discipline through the Lens of a Worship Leader:

Our ministries are the product of our relationship with Christ.⁵³ In John 15:4-5 Jesus says, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; itself must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Songs of worship must be formed from a life of worship.⁵⁴ Our songs need to reflect what God has placed on our hearts. The lead singer of Sting was once asked how he writes songs, he responded “I don’t really know’ ...A melody is always a gift from somewhere else.

⁵⁰ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing 1998) 33

⁵¹ Rory Noland, *The Heart of the Artist* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1999) 330

⁵² Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing 1998) 33

⁵³ Rory Noland, *The Heart of the Artist* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1999) 328

⁵⁴ Tim Hughes, *Here I Am to Worship* (Ventura: Regal Books 2004) 143

You just have to be grateful and pray that you will be blessed again.”⁵⁵ Songs we write not only have an impact on people within church walls, but they can reach beyond them. Our songs are played at parties, gigs, or on the radio. That song sticks in their head and allows them to think about and then break it down to its theological basis. This is imperative that the music that is chosen by the worship leader is theologically sound. Worship leaders make sure the lyrics of a song stay strong throughout the piece and ultimately give God the glory and not ourselves.⁵⁶ When it is all said and done, the job of a worship leader is to desire more of Jesus. God needs to be what we revolve around. John the Baptist puts it like this, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

Music in Worship:

Music needs to be integral to the corporate worship setting. Music gives hope and can bring peace. We are made in His image. Therefore we have qualities of divinity. The ability to create a song, a worship set, or a picture is a part of the image we are made in. “Creation is alive with musicality; and every sound, note and strain is a response to the divine, pointing to the author of all life, God Himself.”⁵⁷ Music allows the church body to join together as one voice and sing to God. There are numerous portraits throughout the Old Testament of people of God gathering and utilizing music to express their worship. God even gives us an entire book of 150 passionate prayer and praise songs titled Psalms. Christian artists need to understand that creating art is indistinguishable from worshipping Jesus.⁵⁸ “Their art may be their specialty, and

⁵⁵ Ibid. 139

⁵⁶ Stephen Holmes, *The Scottish Journal of Theology: The Constructed Theology of Contemporary Worship Events* (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press 2013) 194

⁵⁷ Matt Redman, *Facedown* (Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2004) 72

⁵⁸ Harold Best, *Unceasing Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003) 113

its quality may be—should be—of the highest, but it has no greater standing before God than an honestly prepared income tax return.”⁵⁹

We can talk about how beautiful music is and what it can do in our lives, but we also have to remember that chaos monster. It can use music against us as well by taking it out of its context, out of its purposed aesthetic excellence. How can he do this? A past example of this would be during World War II. Beethoven’s music could engage impressive powers of the human spirit. The Nazi’s saw a better use for the music and completely changed the aesthetic beauty of the music.⁶⁰ They used the music to embellish and strengthen their malicious objectives manipulating the fittingness intensity to their ends. Another account of this is the Ku Klux Klan taking many cherished hymns of Protestant churches and using them to justify and celebrate their acts of terrorism against people who were not of their race or background.⁶¹ If we were to take the military “Taps” song out of its context and play it at a wedding instead of a funeral, the aesthetic excellence that piece will have on the listeners is going to be detrimental. Best puts it this way, “the public will confuse artistic content and the artist’s intent and arbitrarily accept or reject both art and artist on that ground.”⁶² This idea outlines what happens when songs are taken out of their intended fittingness-intensity. We are the ones who take beauty and use it to embellish evil, but we are also the ones who can use it to inspire the utmost and most divine desires of our hearts.

Musical Examples:

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Thomas H. Troeger, *Music as Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 22

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Harold Best, *Unceasing Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003) 113

How does all this tie into the music we sing on Sunday? The choices we make for a worship set can go two ways, initiation and response.⁶³ John 5:19 says “Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.’” The Holy Spirit has to be the one leading worship. Matt Redman says that when we see the Holy Spirit as the worship leader, we realize more than ever that we can’t make worship happen. “Too often we slip into the mind-set that by playing the songs louder or faster or using the most popular song around, we will have an amazing time of worship.”⁶⁴ We initiate in our own strength. We must combine the disciplines of worship, prayer, and practice to be able to create a composition of aesthetic excellence. Far too often we take songs that are popular and perform them in our set, but we do not do our homework and find the meaning of the song. For example, in the song “In the Secret” by Andy Park, we see a song and express necessity to know a particular person who is not mentioned.⁶⁵ This song can easily be taken out of context. The lyrics can stand only in the church or in a setting that states God as King. The first verse song lyrics are as followed:

In the secret, in the quiet place
 In the stillness You are there.
 In the secret, in the quiet hour I wait,
 Only for You, 'cause I want to know You more;⁶⁶

If the song were sung outside the church walls by a person tuning into it on the radio, they could be taken out of context. This could be taken as giving praise to another lover. For example, if this song is playing on the radio and an unbeliever is listening in, they would have no clue who

⁶³ Tim Hughes, *Here I Am to Worship* (Ventura: Regal Books 2004) 63

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Andy Park, *In the Secret*, (Sugar Land: Vineyard Music 2004)

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

“You” is without a lyric sheet in front of them. This song is not meeting the criteria of the song worshipping our God or praying to our God. The song does use the elements of music in unity, variety, or fittingness-intensity. The song begins to meet parts of aesthetic excellence, but needs work on the lyrics for it to be considered in a worship setting.

If we look at the chord progression throughout the song the harmonic progression of the verses is I, IV, vi, V, I. Also if we listen to the song, we then can hear that the song sounds joyous. The melody and chords do not match up with what the lyrics are trying to portray. In fact the song lacks any type of word painting at all. Word painting is the musical depiction of words in text. Using the device of word painting, the music tries to imitate the emotion, action, or natural sounds as described in the text. For example, if the text describes a sad event, the music might be in a minor key. Conversely, if the text is joyful, the music may be set in a major key.⁶⁷ This section does not have harmonies which are typical for the beginning of a worship song. The tone of the singer is one that brings about joy and therefore does not meet criteria for fittingness-intensity. The tempo in this is too upbeat for what the song is trying to highlight. Slowing down the tempo will create more of a “secret” and “quiet” place.

The chorus part has these lyrics:

I want to know You, I want to hear your voice,
 I want to know You more.
 I want to touch You, I want to see your face,
 I want to know You more.⁶⁸

The chords through the chorus are I, V, vi, IV, I, V, IV and then repeats. The tone of the singer is the same through this part as well, where his tone implies joy and happiness. This section has the

⁶⁷ OnMusic Dictionary (2015) http://dictionary.onmusic.org/terms/3957-word_painting

⁶⁸ Andy Park, In the Secret, (Sugar Land: Vineyard Music 2004)

ability to put tears in people’s eyes if the choices the artist made would align with the model of aesthetic excellence that Dr. Schantz depicted.⁶⁹ Simply changing the melody and using a warm and subtle tone, would take away the joy of the song and give a more serious ambience.

Harmonies at the same tone bring out a new dynamic with the different sounds that are created, but at a lower dynamic than the melody.

Overall this song is limited in its ability to reach out to others. To understand who the song is about we need to have the lyrics right in front of us. If “You” is capitalized, then that does denote God, but how is someone listening on the radio supposed to know that? To add to it, how are they supposed to know what the “secret” and “quiet” place is when the music does not reflect it? The elements of the song do not flow together to create a song that has unity, variety, or fitting-intensity. Therefore, the song cannot be aesthetically excellent.

Let’s look at the song “My Heart is Yours” by Kristian Stanfill.⁷⁰ The song is written from Luke 9:23, “Then he said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’” The lyrics in the song echo the Scripture the artist is using. The harmonic progression for the first verse is IV, I6, V, vi7, IV.

The lyrics for the first verse are:

Verse 1:
 I give You my life
 I give You my trust
 Jesus
 You are my God
 You are enough
 Jesus⁷¹

⁶⁹ Allen Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible* (Aesthetic Arts Press 2015) 49

⁷⁰Kristian Stanfill, Brett Younker, Daniel Carson, and Jason Ingram, *My Heart is Yours*, (New York: Sony ATV Timber Publishing / Open Hands Music 2014)

⁷¹ Kristian Stanfill, Brett Younker, Daniel Carson, and Jason Ingram, *My Heart is Yours*, (New York: Sony ATV Timber Publishing / Open Hands Music 2014)

At this point the song starts off soft dynamically. The vocalist then comes in with a voice that is light. The singer is starting a prayer. He starts with a declarative statement that aligns with Luke 9. When he enters, his tone is very clear and soft, but he is declaring that he is giving his life and trust to God. He declares that God is the only God for him. The song has great unity of the elements with the soft dynamics and soft tone. The tempo and rhythm also have a fittingness-intensity that is united with what the instruments and voices are doing. This song starts off the exact opposite from “In the Secret” and already has a sense of direction and purpose. We have already begun glorifying God by proclaiming Him as our God and that He is enough for us. The harmonic progression through the chorus is IV, V_{sus}, IV, vi⁷, V_{sus}. The song then transitions in to the chorus,

My heart is Yours
 My heart is Yours
 Take it all
 Take it all
 My life in Your hands

There is little change with the dynamics at this point. Another voice part is added in unison to give more definition to what is being said. The writer is letting it build to transition into the second verse. The writer is showing great discipline in patience and waiting for the right moment to release the climax of the song.

I lay down my life
 And take up my cross
 Jesus
 For You are my God
 Whatever the cost
 Jesus
 For You, Jesus⁷²

⁷² Kristian Stanfill, Brett Younker, Daniel Carson, and Jason Ingram, *My Heart is Yours*, (New York: Sony ATV Timber Publishing / Open Hands Music 2014)

This is where we hear the music make a dramatic shift. The song picks up a little tempo and rhythmically there are more subdivisions being played. The singer's voice is brighter and asserting his stance more fervently, but we have yet to hit the climax of the song. All of this is being done to set the tone for another dramatic shift in the second verse.

The song then transitions back to the chorus, where harmonies are added and the band is full of sound. "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear" (Heb. 5:7). That is happening in this section, by offering up our hearts to God, we are pleading to the One who is able to save us from death.

We then shift to the bridge of the song, where the climax happens. The writer uses a sustained chord at the end of the chorus to build up the emotion and use it as a cliffhanger to pour into the bridge. We finally hear the band at its fullest; three vocal harmonies are being sang on top the band harmonies. The dynamic has reached the maximum volume it will get throughout the song. This gives the feeling of total surrender when we are praying, worshipping, or making music. The song then ends with it going back to the chorus soft one time and finishing up at the same level of intensity during the bridge. The harmonic progress through the bridge is I, V, V, I, vi7, IV, V, I. The lyrics of the bridge are,

All to Jesus I surrender
 All to You I freely give
 I will ever love and trust You
 In Your presence I will live⁷³

The song at this point has reached a point in unity, variety, and fittingness-intensity to be

⁷³ Kristian Stanfill, Brett Younker, Daniel Carson, and Jason Ingram, *My Heart is Yours*, (New York: Sony ATV Timber Publishing / Open Hands Music 2014)

considered aesthetically excellent. The musical elements all align together in unity. The song has a lot of variety in the formulation of the piece. The overall layout of the song brings out what the composer wanted to portray. The piece gives glory to God through the prayer of the worshipper's heart.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, music as prayer is very possible. The early church set a foundation of prayer and music. By taking the three aesthetics of excellence and tying them together with worship, prayer, and music, we get music that glorifies God. A worship leader is disciplined in his worship, prayer, and musical practice to create aesthetically pleasing music. He is willing to sacrifice to God and give God his full trust. Pray continuously for his heart to be aligned with God's heart, he seeks to be patient and know that God will answer his prayers. There is an enemy who will try to uproot everything we work so hard to sow. God does not cease to let us down, as He gives us the Holy Spirit to be a guide and voice for when we lose direction. This all works together in harmony to create a two to three minute song, but the results are that of aesthetic excellence and our ability to create music that glorifies our God. Worship music does not have to be entertainment on Sunday. It can have a purpose and vision to bring the Gospel throughout. Music can be a prayer.

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