

Godly Craftsmanship:
Making Music to the Glory of God

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Music is a craft, and although its benefits and beauty are unquantifiable, it should be respected and approached emotionally and physically, spiritually and rationally. It's my belief that music is something that translates beyond words, a fact that's hard for me to admit, but music without words can still possess a profound and undeniable power.

I want to explore music as a craft to be mastered, a power to be handled with care, and a language that speaks to the unknown. It is my goal in this paper to convince you that music is a powerful force but also that it is only a tool with no extra significance or ability to change our minds independently. Without being watched however, it can sway us towards our inhibitions when dealt with mindlessly. This paper will first discuss the creative side of humanity and explore the Biblical basis in which God informs us to create in His image. Then we will explore the proper way to approach music and culture, specifically, enabling a musician to create art that is timeless and powerful to the glory of God while balancing a relevance with culture. Then we will explore music and the importance of creating music with fundamental truth and a foundation of excellence. Lastly we'll explore music as spiritual expression, discovering the nature infused into our being and the mystery musicians are gifted with as spiritual ambassadors.

Biblical Principal's of Craftsmanship

Harold Best writes that “the Scriptures not only articulate a distinction between truth and handiwork, they denounce any linkage between the two. Such a linkage is idolatry. When we commit idolatry we abuse our creative gifts in the most flagrant way by fabricating concrete connections between what we believe and what we make.”¹ It is

¹Harold Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993. Pg. 48.

important from the beginning to understand that there is nothing wrong with enjoying music as artistry. This is a concept I believe I have struggled with when striving for purity in my life. To often I would link my self worth with my craft, and, in doing so would create the idea (in the case of music) that a certain style is evil or that a non-Christian artist is incapable of creating something worth listening to. If this were the case then the world would be a far different place. My challenge to Christians is to be inspired by good art regardless of its purpose and then harness it as a craft in order to create something that's inspiring with the purpose of bringing God glory. So what does the Bible tell us about music? It seems there are many musicians skilled in the art of music making at the height of David's reign. God's people used music to celebrate the works of their creator and David himself used his musical talent to sooth the soul of King Saul. Psalm 92: "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre."² When I meditate on these words I'm reminded that the Bible gives us a purpose for our music making. It is true that beautiful music can be made for not nearly as great a cause, but beautiful music is a gift given to us as the created. Skill and talent can be developed and truth can be proclaimed through the songs of all God's creatures. Birds naturally sing out a melodious tune and I often praise God for the wonderful songs they sing, but that's my choice, others may hear and give glory to the bird and its magnificence.

² *ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version*. ESV Text ed. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2007.

In other ways the Bible, says absolutely nothing about the act of making music at all even though it should inform our music making. In David Peterson's book 'Engaging With God' he lays out in great detail the practices and symbolism present in the ancient Jewish culture as mapped out in the Old Testament. Much of what he has to say is that at the heart of the culture was the pursuit of God, and the desire to draw closer to an understanding of who God is.

Decisive for understanding the Old Testament view of worship is the idea that the God of heaven and earth had taken the initiative in making himself known, first to the patriarchs of Israel and then, through the events of the exodus from Egypt and the encounter on Mount Sinai, to the nation as a whole. The book of Exodus proclaims that God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt so that they might serve or worship him exclusively. They were redeemed in order to engage with God, initially at 'the mountain of God', then in the wilderness wanderings, and finally in the land which was to be his gift to them. The ark and the tabernacle were to function as an expression of God's continuing presence with them and his rule over them.³

Peterson's words summarize the beginning of Israel's journey but even from the beginning God is showing us the way in which we should approach Him.

This understanding should inform and enhance our music making. Our desire should develop for him alone and in whatever we do and in all that we create we should allow His deep love to inform us. David's use of musicians is not important in style but in heart. He desired to serve the nation and give them the gift of music in order to honor and exalt their rightful leader, foreshadowing the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now among other things proper to recreate man and give him pleasure, music is either the first or one of the principal, and we must think of it as a gift of God deputed to that purpose. For which reason we must be the more careful not to abuse it to our condemnation when it has been dedicated to our profit and welfare. (Calvin, Preface to the Geneva Psalter)⁴

³ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993. Pg. 48-49.

⁴ Ned Bustard, *It Was Good: Making Music to the Glory of God*. 1st ed. Baltimore, Maryland: Square Halo Books, 2013. Pg. 18.

In his essay, David Fuentes quotes Calvin to aid his readers in the understanding that we have been given a freedom through music that is true and in many ways essential to all, but just as it has the ability to give us all freedom, it can just as easily enslave us. He talks about the power and truth in the James Taylor song “Fire and Rain”. The actual meaning of the song gives little aid for our purposes, but Fuentes claims you can feel the emotions Taylor is trying to demonstrate through the music even if you do not understand the meaning of the lyrics. This is why one should be careful to use the gift of music well without abuse.

His second example was the Black Eyed Peas song “I’ve Got a Feeling”. The song is well crafted for its purpose. It makes you feel as if you are walking up to a club or party, and transports you to a place of reckless abandon. He points to the fact that James Taylor’s song has a deeper truth infused into its lyrics where as the hedonism glorified in “I’ve Got a Feeling” is not easily turned to something for the purpose of Godly worship because the music is so inherently a part of the song. So if we approach music as a tool and respect the implications of the beat behind the lyrics as well as the intent of the artists, for some songs it can be harder to separate the words from the music.

So why do I bring up these artists? We as artists and songwriters in particular must imitate good writers. Music is a craft and there is a proper way to write a good song. First we must sit down and take the time to write, but even within that process inspiration needs to come from somewhere. Then within our inspiration we need to practice good technique in song writing and song structure. Vito Aiuto writes, “But before improvisation – and in service to the passion to save, to write, to create – you have to learn how to sit down and spell and how to make good sentences. You have to practice

chords and learn about song structure. And before you can learn to make a good song, you have to learn to hear one, to identify one.”⁵ You can’t just expect your talent and passion to jump onto the page and out of your heart. Good intentions don’t create good art. First we become a good student of whatever we’re trying to create and in time we learn to be a masterful artist.

If we treat history as our teacher an understanding should grow that then in turn develops either a knowledge of what should not be repeated or enable us to recreate new versions of old ways of thinking that will move us forward and help us to create in ways that fill the empty void or add to that which is meaningful in our lives. The thinking is that you can’t have anything real until you’ve listened to an experts voice on the matter.

At one point in time, the church required that all her bishops have the Psalter memorized. If you wanted to be a pastor, you needed to have all 150 Psalms memorized. And the rationale of the church for this was that knowing these prayers by rote was the only way you could really learn how to pray. They believed that before you could have anything real to say, you had to learn someone else’s words.⁶

So you learn from someone else’s words but in the process from the silence you find your own voice. Annie Dillard: “A writer looking for subjects inquires not after what he loves best, but after what he alone loves at all.”⁷ I believe that everyone has his or her own way of seeing the world, but in order to cast that vision one must learn how to communicate well the things which they alone can offer to the world.

⁵ Ned Bustard, *It Was Good: Making Music to the Glory of God*. 1st ed. Baltimore, Maryland: Square Halo Books, 2013. Pg. 107.

⁶ Ned Bustard, *It Was Good: Making Music to the Glory of God*. 1st ed. Baltimore, Maryland: Square Halo Books, 2013. Pg. 108.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 108

While serving in the Marine Corps my unit took an afternoon off from our usual tasks and did an exercise called “The 4 Lenses”.⁸ This is a study, like the Meyers and Briggs personality test that helps you discover the various personality types that exist. Within our small unit of 50 service men and women there existed a great amount of diversity, not just in skin color and up-bringing; but unrelated I discovered a link between some of my friends and the strengths and weaknesses of their personality types. My friend Miguel was a blue, which meant he’s very loyal and compassionate, but if he feels you’ve wronged him, it’s hard for him to trust again because the wounds are deep. My friend Andy was a green, which demonstrated his mechanical skills and ability to get things done. The yellows were very organized individuals and did best when working in an environment that was predictable and structured. For the rest of us, orange is the color of the free spirit types who could easily adapt to every situation and liked to have excitement and variety. It wasn’t a life-changing event, but I do think it helped our unit to at least be aware of each other’s differences. And for the first time in my life I experienced in a controlled setting the truth that we all have a different voice. Even within the sub groups created, no individual was the same in the amount that each “lens” contributed to the way in which they viewed the world. The reality is that no one is purely orange, green, yellow, or blue. We are all made up of varying degrees of each color and therefore have differences that exist within our similarities. This study demonstrates in a small way the untapped potential of humanity to cultivate and enhance the ways in which we see the world.

⁸ "4 Lenses™ Assessment." 4 Lenses™ Assessment. Accessed April 22, 2015. http://www.shipleycommunication.com/assessments/4_lenses/.

It's important that we seek to understand each other and listen to great art and understand when we love something as well as when we hate it. If we're seeking to be Jesus Christ's body on earth, how important is it that we represent Him well? How important is it to do it in the way that we were created for?

1 Corinthians 12:4-7: "Now there are a variety of gifts but the same spirit; and there are varieties of service but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."⁹ It is a disservice to Christ's Church for us to act outside of what he's created us for. So whether we create art, we do our chores, we work our jobs, or just fill our time, all that we do is meaningless without the infusion of Christ's love. Then if that love is changing us, it in turn will change our music making.

The Bible is important to our music making, not only because it mentions music and its importance throughout, but also because it should inform our lives and develop the truths that we infuse our music with. It's with this truth that I add the disclaimer; I don't believe we should do anything that we aren't fully convinced of. Romans 14:5-8:

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.¹⁰

⁹ *ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version*. ESV Text ed. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2007.

¹⁰ *ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version*. ESV Text ed. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2007.

It goes on later to say that each one of us will give our own account to the Lord. So by no means am I saying it's ok to engage the culture if it's leading you to struggle and sin, but I am saying that it's not clear-cut and simple either.

This next section demonstrates both my own personal experience with engaging culture, as well as the findings of others. As I write I am confident in my salvation and have a clear conscience before the Lord. My hope is that through this study I will draw closer to the heart of God as well as develop a deeper understanding of the way in which other Christians worship their creator, despite the ways in which I remain unconvinced.

Beautiful Music and a Broken World

When I drive, I go through phases with the music I listen to. For about 2 weeks I'd been listening to mostly music created with the purpose of aiding Christians in the act of prayerful song and worship. It'd lasted quite a bit longer than usual, but one day I decided to listen to classic rock and the song "Free Bird" came on the radio. Immediately I was a bit judgmental, forgetting the actual context of the song, I thought of the movie "Forrest Gump" and the heroin scene in which Jenny debates jumping off the ledge of a tall building. Jenny's character in the movie is in the midst of rebellion. At this point in the movie she is at the culmination of her bad choices and reaches a tipping point like the prodigal son in the Bible, but the song really doesn't carry this connotation at all. The words take you to a moment of honesty when the man realizes he doesn't love his current girl enough to stay with her. At the same time he's not saying he doesn't love her at all, he just loves his freedom more. Ultimately the power of the song isn't in the words, they're actually quite inconsequential, and I'm only waiting for the solo guitar at the end. I get goose bumps as the solo takes me on a journey to really nowhere. Lynyrd Skynyrd

wrote a song as creative people, with no real spiritual values, in the sense of God and Christianity and yet I know that this song is good art. People connect and dance to it, they get lost and worship it, and they scream for it so much that we even make jokes about it. Just like my experience, everyday we make instant connections with melody lines that have the power to connect us to very different places. Where many people might connect “Free Bird” to Forrest Gump as I did, others might connect it to their childhood, a rock concert they experienced, or a bar they frequent.

When we think of craftsmen throughout history, it must be understood that many non-Christians have created great architecture, inventions, paintings, and songs. What someone may have intended as an idol can still be in and of itself considered beautiful. Harold Best states, when speaking of an artist or craftsman, “They can maintain complete freedom from the artwork, while being completely free to act with it. Faith rules over works, maker over handiwork, revelation over creation, and creator over all.”¹¹ With this in mind it’s important to remember that music does not become us, humans have the ability to give music power in their lives, but it’s not the music that is the problem. Best says that music is morally neutral. In his book ‘Music Through the Eyes of Faith’ he gives three main thoughts when discussing the relationship between musical content and context. For one he says that music is flexible. The meaning can shift while remaining great in its own right, “Music as music is completely relative.”¹² His second thought is that although music is wordless and deedless, the context and the people making it are not. The more it’s made in a certain context, the more it will begin to take its meaning

¹¹ Harold Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993. Pg. 50.

¹² *Ibid.*, Pg. 54.

from that context. But the musical context itself doesn't create the phenomenon. This context is similar to the one discussed earlier about "I've Got a Feeling". His third point is that there's a difference between being moved by music and being morally directed or changed by it. Mark 7:15: "It is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean."¹³ Best states, "People will behave exactly the way they want to, down deep in their hearts."¹⁴

Best brings out some very important things to remember that I have found to be true. From my early teens, I have rarely been surprised by the choices of those I am close to. I've seen my best friends make bad decisions and felt regret, but it's never deeply surprised me. In the same way I've continued to fall back into sin countless times and felt regret but it isn't until I decide down deep in my soul and make the choice to pursue God and give him that part of my life that a change occurs. Leading to the truth that we will behave exactly how we want to.

So what about music? Why does it appear on the surface to control people's lives and actions? How can a song make someone dance or make immoral choices? Best states, "It's just as wrong to assume that music causes worship as it is to say that it causes sexual behavior."¹⁵ But he doesn't exclude Christians, later he says, "We might go as far as to say that some handiwork-dependent Christians shoot up with music on any given Sunday...getting some kind of high or fix."¹⁶ As a musical worship leader myself, I would venture to say that Harold Best isn't stretching that far in his statement. It isn't

¹³ *ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version*. ESV Text ed. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2007.

¹⁴ Harold Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993. Pg. 56.

¹⁵ Harold Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993. Pg. 56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Pg. 56.

anyone's fault really, but do we recognize the capability of human beings to turn a good thing into a God thing? We as humans are created to worship God as creator, but when unbridled have a tendency to stray from our intended into the arms of another god. The crazy thing about music is that although it is not a physical or measurable thing, it does fall into the category of something capable of captivating our hearts. Therefore, "it's not what music does to us, it is what we choose to do with music, by virtue of the condition of our heart."¹⁷ Let us remember that from the beginning, God knew the power of music, Steve Turner states, "I think that art can delight or offend God, but it can never surprise Him."¹⁸ All things are created by God and live and move through Him.

Growing up in a Christian home, (in hindsight) I am glad that I was sheltered from certain things. I recall my mother one time smashing a VHS that my brother and I had secretly bought. It wasn't pornography, I don't even know if it was rated R, but when my mother walked in there was a scene full of sexual promiscuity and wild partying. To look back on that moment now I feel protected. Because although I went on to do and watch bad things, I believe my view has been greatly impacted by my mother's righteous anger in that moment. All this to say that I watch lots of things now that I consider being good art because of the honesty portrayed. Some of the best films I've seen and hold onto come from a strongly secular viewpoint, but what I like is that they show what we're up against. They show through raw emotion and emptiness what exists without Christ. Now don't get me wrong, I've also watched a lot of bad art and I don't think it's tasteful to show nudity. And I don't think it makes something less real to not show every aspect of

¹⁷ Ibid., Pg. 56.

¹⁸ Steve Turner, *Popcultured: Thinking Christianly about Style, Media and Entertainment*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013. Pg. 18.

life, as we know it. But I've grown deeper and prayed harder because of moving films about loss and loneliness or deep pain or even T.V. shows that show characters making bad decisions, and then dealing with the many deep consequences. My experience hasn't been perfect in this, but it has been worth looking into for me. It's not something I feel we, as Christians should run from or create a separated culture. We have been placed here to engage and therefore we should be able to appreciate truth while shedding light in the darkness and bringing hope to the hopeless. Popular culture has shown me repeatedly that everyone is searching and in need of redemption.

I once heard David Garrison speak. Garrison authored the book "A Wind in the House of Islam" and is currently the V.P. of the International Mission Board. Due to his great amount of research in authoring his book, he has spent most of his life in missionary work as well as research regarding the movements of Islam that have converted to Christianity. His entire sermon was interesting, but one of the things he said that was most relevant to this paper was that the greatest thing we can do is to expose Islam for what it truly is. He was speaking from the perspective that since the beginning of Islam, the teachings of the Koran had never been translated from 7th century Aramaic into the native tongues of those who follow Allah and adhere to Mohammed as the truest prophet of God. Muslims will read it and not understand what they're reading and in a story that Garrison told, a convert he met was doing just that during his lunch breaks while working on the docks in the United States somewhere (he didn't disclose the location). As he read, he was hoping to be receiving the mystical power of the book when an American worker spotted him and asked him what he was doing. The young man told him and began reciting a passage from memory and the American asked him what it

meant, to which the Muslim told him he didn't know. The American said that he was stupid for doing such a thing. Now years later he's converted to Christianity because he's read the Gospel and believes that Jesus is who he claimed to be. It's now his belief that if people truly read the Koran and understood it, they'd find that even the Jesus mentioned in the Koran is better than Mohammad. It wasn't until recently that the Koran was translated to many different languages and that an average Muslim can now understand what they're reading.

This isn't the only way to reach people with the gospel, but when we cast light on the darkness and demonstrate who God truly is we enable Him to change the world. It isn't that we lure others away from the wrongs they are committing (as sinners) but that, instead, they understand the emptiness being promoted and are drawn to the gospel that we proclaim. They realize for themselves that Jesus is who he claimed to be.

Before going any further into this idea of engaging the culture, I feel that it's important for me to clarify. Just as a recovering alcoholic should not try to preach the gospel in the local bar, we also should be aware of our struggles. It is not the call of a former womanizer to help vulnerable women in their pursuit of God. So within this study of culture, once you've found your passion, prepare your heart to be effective and to allow God to penetrate your life so deeply that you can then bring glory to the Trinity because you can then remain blameless before men. For Jesus says in Matthew that we aren't to worry about the problems of this world our call is to, Matthew 6:33, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."¹⁹ Jesus

¹⁹ *ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version*. ESV Text ed. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2007.

urges his disciples in the garden to pray that they may not fall into temptation. Paul urges Christians to put on the full armor of God because this is a real spiritual battle. We are called to sexual purity for protection. We are called to the fruits of the spirit for protection. We are called to love our neighbor for protection from the evil one. These are not guidelines to a prosperous life; these are the ways that lead to life everlasting because these are the ways in which Jesus lived.

In giving his take on Pop culture, Steve Turner cites sources and trends that in today's world the average person spend much more time on entertainment than at any other time in history. In some ways it's not that in the past people didn't like to be entertained but they had little time for it. Also the instant access just didn't exist, as we know it today. Will Galgey, the Managing Director of Trends Consultancy for The Futures Company, commented, "it's a big shift from material goods to experiences...our consumption is about how to enhance our experiences even in the context of our own homes."²⁰ A few statistics he has found that highlight this fact, specifically in the realm of music is that the average person listens to 11.5 hours of music a week and 64.7% of people say that if they could only keep one source of entertainment, they'd keep their music.²¹ Facts such as these, and an awareness of the times are very helpful in allowing us to speak into our context. If people are seeking out experiences, we should lure them in to churches that offer them the chance to experience Jesus.

One of the most successful brands in the United States sells an experience. In an article about the Starbucks experience, Stephan Vincent writes, "It all comes down to the

²⁰ Steve Turner, *Popcultured: Thinking Christianly about Style, Media and Entertainment*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013. Pg. 19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Pg. 20.

experience, which ever corner of the world you are in. Starbucks has successfully brought to the US a social experience from Europe (get together around a cup of coffee), but more surprisingly has brought a similar although different experience to the rest of the world.”²² Vincent writes that it’s not the best coffee but so many other factors lend to the experience that you will see job interviews taking place, families stopping in for a treat, tattooed baristas serving CEO’s and creating an intersection between Global and local.

Some would argue against even going to Starbucks as a Christian let alone creating a ministry based on the business model. My purpose is not to argue for going to Starbucks or to tell anyone they’re wrong for not going, but it does support Turner’s findings and is a fine indication that our culture will buy an experience. With this in mind I would argue for the programming of a ministry to look into the effectiveness of this, and use the data that is Starbucks in order to address the symptom and fills the void of an experience-driven culture. To look at Starbucks and say their values are skewed and their coffee is sub par, I will not support that is like saying the music is the problem when in fact as we’ve discussed the music is only a tool and can be an aid to transport the source.

Turner believes that being able to relate and speak truth into a non-believers life is important. We must find the truth in the culture and relate it to Jesus. A great biblical example he uses for support is Paul in Athens. He doesn’t wait for the people to come to him; he heads to the city’s epicenter (the Starbucks of his time) and begins presenting the Gospel. Turner also cites the language of Paul in relating to the visuals of the day, running a race to receive a crown.

²² Stephan Vincent, "Starbucks: The Brand Experience More than the Coffee." Innovation Excellence Raquo. August 24, 2014.

“Why should I need these cheap amusements when I should be relying on God totally for everything? Only non-believers need these things because their lives are so empty without God.”²³ Turner makes this statement as reasoning common to the church. Dating back to the times of the Puritans and it still exists today in some ways more extreme than others.

The Amish religious community for example, adheres to strict rules which they believe help in maintaining closeness and devotion with God. The Amish community believes that the use of technology and the conveniences of modern culture are unnecessary. But the degree in which each community holds to these standards varies. Wanda E. Brunstetter writes,

Many of the differences are subtle: Different style of hats for the men and prayer coverings for the women; length and color choices for the women’s dresses; type of suspenders for the men’s trousers; scooters ridden in some communities, while bicycles are used in others; and differences in the size, shape, and color of Amish buggies. Some of the stronger differences include: How and whether phones are used — some have phone sheds or shanties outside the home; some, who own businesses, are allowed to use cell phones; some have no phones at all. Some can have tractors; some cannot. Some are allowed rubber tires, others only iron wheels. Some Amish places of business are allowed to use electricity, and even computers, while others use only gas and battery-operated lights and cash registers. Most Amish homes have indoor plumbing, but there are a few of the older, stricter communities where outhouses are still in use. The rules for each district are governed by what their bishop and ministers will allow, and what’s considered right according to the Ordnung, church rules.²⁴

Brunstetter has studied Amish communities across 10 states and her findings are representative of the great diversity that is present among the Amish.

²³ Steve Turner, *Popcultured: Thinking Christianly about Style, Media and Entertainment*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013. Pg. 46.

²⁴ Wanda Brunstetter, "Amish Facts - Wanda Brunstetter." Wanda Brunstetter. Accessed April 11, 2015. Web.

I was raised in a community in Iowa that did business with the Amish. The Amish community nearest me could own varying degrees of lawn mowers and actually ran the dealership that we bought our family mowers from. They had cell phones for work purposes and were able to receive rides from the local English (as they called us). You might say that the Amish I grew up around were more liberal. They were successful businessmen and women who contributed greatly to the community. But the Amish in the neighboring community were much different. They dressed differently; they couldn't have covers on their buggies or even zippers on their pants. "This argument presupposes that we're only delighting in God during the moments when we're doing overtly 'religious' things. Yet we directly experience the benevolence of God through the things he gives us as well as in quiet moments of reflection of worship."²⁵ For me I find a resonance with Turner's argument. As I've stated, often the media I enjoy helps me grasp more deeply the wounds of the culture and the lies that have twisted our thinking. At the same time, I have no problem with the heart of the Amish cultures, but there is a fine line to be drawn between pious living and self-righteousness. Personally, I feel as close to God when praying for the things revealed through popular art and culture as I do when I'm meditating on his words (though the two are not equal). This isn't to say that there is anything inherently wrong with the Amish way of life unless they believe others to be unsaved because they don't adhere to their ideals of righteous living. To that end we are not now, nor has works ever saved us, but we are saved by grace that no man can boast.

²⁵ Steve Turner, *Popcultured: Thinking Christianly about Style, Media and Entertainment*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013. Pg. 46.

“Culture is one of the ways God stimulates our intellects, soothes our troubled minds, reveals the wonder of life, gives us insights into memory triggers, challenges our assumptions, trains our eyes to see, reveals to us both beauty and ugliness, exalts our spirits, delights our senses, makes us laugh and reveals aspects of His character.”²⁶

Although I don't entirely agree with Turner on all levels, I do think it's worth mentioning an argument he has on this matter that is thought provoking. In thinking of Jesus temptation in the desert, Jesus states to the devil that man does not live on bread alone. From Turner's perspective, a person's ability to balance a healthy dose of the Bible while also maintaining a healthy enjoyment of culture is the way to go. I mention this because I tend to agree that a balance is necessary, but it is a tricky subject for me to consider because although by no means do I think Turner is putting cultural awareness on par with the word of God, in a culture that tends to push the scales as far as they can, I will never rightly be able to push the balance away from the bible. Therefore it's imperative that we maintain a healthy dose of culture, while maintaining the bible as our primary source.

On the other hand, Turner believes there is a danger when using the Bible alone approach; he argues that churches living under this mantra have wrought destruction where they shouldn't. But to that I would say, a misinterpretation of the Bible can lead to this (which is the fault of man), but not the Bible itself, for the Bible I believe to be the Word of God and therefore capable in every way to aid our understanding of the culture for the purpose of the Gospel. I have read about Bishops of Amish communities that have dealt treacherously in the rules for their communities, just as I have heard of tyrant

²⁶ Steve Turner, *Popcultured: Thinking Christianly about Style, Media and Entertainment*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013. Pg. 46.

preachers who staked their claim on the word of God. These examples have nothing to do with the fact that they're Bible alone people and everything to do with the power they abused out of a false sense of righteousness. To me both are a gift from God. It is a gift for us to listen to music and enjoy art. It is a gift for us to have the word of God in our own language. It is a gift for us to be able to engage with creation and enjoy the seasons. Truth is apparent in all things, because all things are from God, but The Bible (unlike the world and its cultures) is untainted and therefore a direct reflection of God.

Culture is important – we punish people by depriving them of culture, plain rooms, jumpsuits, and solitary confinement. The Bible states, “It is not good for man to be alone.” Christians are imprisoned and able to endure through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit, but this isn't how we are called to live or choose to live with few exceptions. Culture has the potential to take us further from God, but that doesn't make it bad in and of itself. That's why it's important that we use the culture to our advantage to the Glory of God. As we create and appreciate culture and music in particular, let us remember the dangers. Let us remember to pray for endurance and let us seek first the Kingdom of God in order that we may be blessed with the life that God has called us to. We pursue purity in Christ because the closer we are to the Father, the greater his impact on our lives can be, the more blameless we will become before God and men and the more people He can reach for His Kingdom.

Fundamentals of Music Making

This summer I was driving north on Interstate 5, or “The Five” as they call it in Southern California. I had flown out to San Diego in June to help build a house in Mexico through Amor Ministries, but the week before my sister and her in-laws had

invited me to spend the week at Disneyland with them. I'd been spending some time with friends and headed north early in the morning to avoid traffic. As I drove I began to appreciate the infrastructure, intricacies of the bridges and roadways. As I passed San Diego I noticed the drainage coming off near one side. The pipe came out underneath the neighboring roadway and the culvert system continued underneath the four lanes of northbound traffic to the east. Now I am no expert in the engineering it takes to create such things, but for the first time in my life I appreciated the inner workings of the highway system and the large amounts of planning it must take to create them.

Do we ever step back and think about what makes something work? As a musician I often feel that most people never look at music the way I looked at that culvert. I would also venture to say that most people don't look at the culvert system the way I did that day either, but I believe it's worth looking into. I believe that we as created beings have an obligation to take the crafting of our creations seriously. When deciding what to write this paper on, I considered writing it about music in school and how I feel it should be a required course like Math or Science. At the end of the day I decided against it because I'm not as deeply passionate about music in Theory as I am about the artistry and mystery of it, but I believe full heartedly that my studies in Musical Perspectives have made me a better student overall. So just as the roadways would not work without the culvert system, our music making is not effective without a solid foundation.

Jamie James, when writing about what the world looked like before the enlightenment said, "There was a time when the universe was believed to cohere, when human life had a meaning and purpose. A person who devoted himself to a lifetime of study, instead of coming out at the end of it the author of a definitive treatise... would

actually have a shot at discovering the key to the universe.”²⁷ The culvert system to me represents more than just the realization of my stupidity but instead a drive in me to be a life long learner. As Greg Wilbur uses this James quote to discuss the origins of music making, he talks about the shift of music from Bach and the Baroque era into the age of Enlightenment. Just as I’ve discussed earlier, I hold that nothing should worry us as Steve Turner reminds us that God ultimately knows what’s happening, but the shift that took place is somewhat alarming. To consider the implications of this shift, it’s important to be aware that we as believers should feel able to create music with the purpose of bringing God glory. This isn’t to say that Bach’s music is better because it was created with a higher purpose, but only that we should know the historical context and discover new ways to bring God glory by perhaps understanding the ways of old. Ned Bustard writes, “There is no way around work. As many times as I try to sit down and make art without putting in time and effort, I run right into the truth that it takes hard work to make good work.” He goes on to say, “The band U2 was encouraged by their producer Brian Eno to look for songs in their mistakes and musings. He told them, “Honor thy error as a hidden intention. It is the slow trudge through one failure after another that gets us up to the top of the mountain where the air is clear and Beauty can be clearly seen.”²⁸

Part of this hard work is trudging through music history even when we don’t want to. Possibly even hating all the composers of the past but learning and understanding why. From this point we can latch on to the understanding of why we love a certain style.

²⁷ Ned Bustard, *It Was Good: Making Music to the Glory of God*. 1st ed. Baltimore, Maryland: Square Halo Books, 2013. Pg. 123.

²⁸ Ned Bustard, *It Was Good: Making Music to the Glory of God*. 1st ed. Baltimore, Maryland: Square Halo Books, 2013. Pg. 3.

In our time we have so much music to be able to compare and contrast. It only makes sense that one person can't stand Bach while someone else loves Mozart, but to learn how to articulate your dislikes and find your likes in the process should be worth exploring for every musician even if only for a short while.

Spiritual Ambassadors

In the book "Creator Spirit", Steven R. Guthrie quotes a novel by Anne Tyler called "Saint Maybe". In the novel Ian Bedloe, is living a normal life, predictable in most ways, successful in the eyes of the world and easy, seemingly planned out. Through the story the Gospel changes Ian. He walks into a church one evening and begins to allow God to dictate deeper decisions in his life. Using the analogy of this story, Guthrie draws the parallel to the reality of Christianity in the United States. We sort of live life as Deists, believing that God exists but that he has no business informing our thinking outside of our occasional brushes with the church. He has no business changing our lives either. At one point in the story, Ian interacts with his friend Sister Harriet who reveals that she made a decision to quit teaching based on a dream she had in which God told her she wasn't gifted to teach children. Ian responds, "I wonder, how many times we dream that kind of dream – something strange and illogical – and fail to realize God is trying to tell us something...It's easier to claim it's something else. Our subconscious, or random brain waves. It's easier to pretend we don't know what God's showing us."²⁹

These thoughts bring to mind both the harsh reality of our thinking at times as well as the joy that could be ours if we only would begin to give it all to God. Ian had

²⁹ Steven R. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011. Pg. 160.

struggled with his identity and the emptiness he found left him unsatisfied. How often do we get caught up in the rut of life and begin to think that we're just living the way we should when instead God has called us to something deeper where perhaps the end is unclear and the future unsecure. Whether we like it or not the story demonstrated by Tyler is all too familiar even if its characters are fictional.

If our starting assumption is the principle of Enlightenment secularism – all events shall be presented God-forsaken unless otherwise proven blessed – then 'discernment' primarily will mean 'remaining wary,' 'staying on one's guard,' or even 'skepticism.' Discernment in this case is cocking one eyebrow at the audacious claim that God is at work.³⁰

Guthrie's words should make us think because in many ways the age of enlightenment has stymied our ability to dream as musicians. He would say that we are in many ways the mystics of our time able to peer into the spiritual and bridge the gap between the seen and unseen. In our time, most claim unbelief in Jesus not because they dislike him. They like his teachings of love and peace but the disconnect then occurs when it comes to Jesus in the spiritual sense. We are just fine with Jesus the man who told stories laden with meaning, who invited himself over to eat with sinners, and turned water into wine. He was a good moral teacher, but if we leave it at that he has no power at all. Without his power over the spiritual there is nothing to be celebrated and no gospel to be preached. All that exists is a terrible act of injustice when an innocent man was murdered out of hate. "Jesus is not the exception but the rule of true humanity. In Him we see what God always intended for us. Humanity was made to be the dwelling place of the creator; we were shaped in such a way as to be filled with the breath of God."³¹ Jesus holds power to

³⁰ Ibid., Pg. 156.

³¹ Steven R. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011. Pg. 157.

rule because he redeemed the purpose of man and demonstrated the power of God by defeating death forever.

“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” I Cor. 2:14. Guthrie states, “Perhaps both the artist and the spiritual person are allied in testifying to a world filled with signs, filled with sign-ificance.”³² How important is it to create art for the purpose of its intention? Guthrie is alluding to the fact that art is a powerful source coming from the same source as religion.

His claim is supported then by Clive Bell, a British Art critic from the early 20th century. When trying to determine the factor of what makes art more than just paint on a canvas or certain songs transcendental he states, “Call it by what name you will, the thing that I am talking about is that which lies behind the appearance of all things – that which gives to all things their individual significance, the thing in itself, the ultimate reality.”³³ Bell seems to be leading towards a sort of Universalist thinking and in a later quote says, “Art may have much to do with that universal emotion that has found a corrupt and stuttering expression in a thousand different creeds.”³⁴ So even in his unbiased sort of way, he seems to still be indicating that there is a proper channel in which this phenomenon occurs in art even if it can be twisted into thousands of different creeds. He gives no indication of his own personal convictions but only that there is an ultimate truth in which all great art reaches out to touch.

³²Ibid., Pg. 159

³³ Ibid., Pg. 160.

³⁴Ibid., Pg. 161.

So it supports my claim to a right form of spiritual otherness. A true creator to be worshiped while at the same time, art and music though infused with spiritual truth can be manipulated toward a false god. So although we shouldn't fear or regard music or art as inherently evil, spiritual truth can be created and good art made with deep significance and understanding though it may not be aimed at the proper target. It is hard to find intimacy with God through Bell's system, but it does lend strongly to the thinking that artists are spiritual ambassadors.

From this Guthrie arrives upon the conclusion that God's creation is allowed to choose and therefore, "God has created a world in which his creatures are allowed to speak with their own voices. And while some of what God's creatures say in their own voices is true, some of what is said is not."³⁵ This makes spiritual discernment all the more important as we pursue God with our music making. The interpretations and claims of many can vary in all directions but when all is said and done we must hold fast to the promises and realities that God has placed upon the hearts of his followers. Just as discussed earlier, our foundation must be grounded in truth that comes from Christ alone. This in turn creates a deeper sense of commitment in which we stand firmly unshakable to create music to the purpose of God, a purpose that we are free to choose or reject.

Conclusion

Music is a craft, and although its benefits and beauty are unquantifiable, it should be respected and approached emotionally and physically, spiritually and rationally. I stated this at the beginning and perhaps you read it and didn't really understand. I started

³⁵Steven R. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011. Pg. 163.

out with the goal of journeying through these topics, I believed this statement to be true but I didn't know if my findings would strengthen my opinion or completely restructure my thinking. My opinion has not changed but my passion has deepened. We've heard from a variety of authors of some, which I don't entirely agree with but all with great passion and clout in their areas of study.

We are all artists. For me personally I am a musician. I write songs but not necessarily well. My area of expertise is actually more in the realm of copying music that's inspired me, and recreating it for others to enjoy. Some might say that it isn't true art the thing that I do, but I make my living doing it. People come up to me following a Sunday service and thank me for leading them passionately. I can't explain why it's meaningful and yet I love what I do and feel God's pleasure when I lead, like Eric Liddell in "Chariots of Fire", "When I run I feel His pleasure."

Sandra McCracken says it best. When pondering the varied roles of people in her life and God's creation, she writes, "God's art making is as vast as the Texas sky, but it can be squeezed into a tiny grain of sand, and then multiplied out by the millions. This is the significance of each hour, each breath, each human being. Who could ever tire of the smell of Earth on your hands? The brilliance of a sunrise?...It is so little, and yet it is too much. May God give us the grace to take it in, and the grace to spend ourselves making and remaking all things for his glory."³⁶ Amen.

³⁶Ned Bustard, *It Was Good: Making Music to the Glory of God*. 1st ed. Baltimore, Maryland: Square Halo Books, 2013. Pg. 31.