

Hope to the Hopeless

The Role of Music in the Healing Ministry of the Christ Follower

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Abstract

This paper will explore the role of a Christ-following musician in relieving suffering through therapeutic music. To understand this identity, one must see its place within the context of creation, the fall, and the redemption of Christ. In the beginning, God created mankind in his image, giving them the *imago Dei* identity with the call to rule and subdue the earth. However, because of the choice of Adam and Eve to turn away from God, sin entered the world. With the coming of sin, brokenness and suffering marred the existence of man. Yet Christ came to earth as the Savior and Redeemer, providing the ultimate relief from suffering. In his example, Christ-following musicians have a calling to alleviate this suffering using the talents God has given them, working for the manifestation of the kingdom of God in earth. A great deal of suffering exists in healthcare settings, where Christ-following musicians can provide holistic relief through therapeutic music. *Holistic* refers to the body, mind, and spirit. First, music provides physical relief from suffering to the body through matching and gradually calming its systems, allowing it to heal itself instead of combating stress. Second, music provides emotional healing through giving hope for the future and distraction from the current situation. Finally, to find spiritual relief and true holistic healing, a musician must have accepted the power of the presence of Jesus Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit. With this presence, as well as the correct utilization of talent and prayer, holistic healing provides hope in a place of great pain. Ultimately, this service reveals the ministry and love of Christ.

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What heart has not felt the ache of suffering? What mind has not at some point been weighed down by the worries of life? What physical body since the Garden of Eden has made it through life without the pain of deterioration, injury, or illness? Such questions leave one to ponder the state of mankind. Regardless, it is clear from an examination of the human condition that emotional, mental, and physical suffering exists in this life. The question is not whether suffering exists, but what should be done to alleviate it.

While clear in theory, such an idea does not always translate into practical implementation. For day-to-day living, how can we who are musicians bring some level of relief to the suffering? Is such alleviation even possible in a fallen world? Theologian N.T. Wright answers this question, saying that we must pray, evangelize, and actively work in the world to bring a representation of the kingdom of God to earth, instead of merely giving up on mankind and longing for the restoration of heaven.¹ Herein lies our identity as Christians and musicians. As redeemed followers of Christ, we seek to continue his ministry to a broken world. As musicians, we carry out this ministry using our unique, God-given gifts. Pairing these two identities, a path emerges. As *imago Dei* Christ-followers, we are called to bring relief from suffering through the talents God has given us. As musicians, we can relieve suffering through in-the-moment, prescriptive live music through the power of presence to help heal the body, mind, and spirit. Yet how do we arrive at this understanding?

First, one must comprehend the identity itself. In this study, the term *imago Dei* Christ-follower is defined as people created in the image of God and called to live accordingly, but who

¹ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. (New York: HarperOne), 208.

have also accepted Christ's forgiveness and redemption and seek to live in his example. This is an identity within the creation mandate in Genesis 3. As his people, God asks us to rule and subdue creation in his image. Thus, we receive the *imago Dei* identity. Combining this with the calling of Christ-followers to continue his kingdom ministry on earth, we find the term *imago Dei* Christ-follower. As musicians, this is manifest through the utilization of the gifts God has given. Yet what does this identity mean in relation to suffering?

Suffering in Light of Creation, the Fall, and Christ

To understand the need for the relief of suffering, one must look at the state of the world. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, culminating this creation with man and woman. As Schantz explains, "The climax of this dramatic story of creation ties human identity to the creation of human beings in the *image* of God".² The significance of this creation of mankind is found in Genesis 1:27: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." From this passage, the idea of *imago Dei* is found. Man is made in the image of God, reflecting his nature. *Imago Dei* is a central idea to understanding the role of mankind in creation, explaining that man is to rule and subdue the earth. N.T. Wright articulates this thought in relation to *imago Dei*, that, "God intends his wise, creative, loving presence and power to be reflected — imaged, if you like — into his world through his human creatures. He has enlisted us to act as his stewards in the project of creation."³ Truly, mankind is intended to be a physical representation of God's nature to the world. It could be called an identity as well as lifestyle for man. Even with this clear calling, how did suffering enter the world?

² Allen Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, (Colorado: Aesthetic Arts Press), 10.

³ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 207.

The answer is found in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve chose their own way over the life God had laid out for them. This resulted in their curse and expulsion from the paradise God had created. With the fall and mankind's decision to turn away, the relationship was fractured. The first entrance of suffering in the world is found in the curse of mankind in Genesis 3:16-19, that "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children...cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field." In addition to this toil for life and livelihood, sin and the habitual choice to favor self over God resulted in death and suffering, as man desired his own gain to the pain of others. God did not intend for suffering in this world, it entered through mankind's choice. This resulted in a shattered view of the purpose of life as *imago Dei* humans: "Instead of humans being God's wise vice-regents over creation, they ignore the creator and try to worship something less demanding, something that will give them short term pleasure. The result is that death, which was always part of the natural transience of the good creation, gains a second dimension, which the Bible sometimes calls "spiritual death."⁴ The corruption of the perfect relationship that God intended between mankind and himself resulted in a fallen world, as outlined in the Old Testament starting with Adam and continuing through the entire story of the nation of Israel.

Yet with the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, hope entered the world. The perfect Lamb and sacrifice, his sinless life and death provided a way to restore the relationship with God. The life and ministry of Jesus Christ clearly shows his emphasis on healing, alleviation of suffering, and, ultimately, bringing hope to the world through salvation. N.T. Wright explains the

⁴ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 95.

importance of Jesus Christ's ministry of hope well: "Following the disaster of rebellion and corruption, he has built into the gospel message the fact that through the word of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, he equips humans to help in the work of getting the project back on track."⁵

The Already but Not Yet

With the coming of Christ and redemption of the world, hope and healing have been offered. Yet even with the salvation given through Christ's sacrifice, why is suffering still present in this world? Writer Madeleine L'Engle communicates this question well, saying, "The problem of pain, of war and the horror of war, of poverty and disease is always confronting us. But a God who allows no pain, no grief, also allows no choice."⁶ Herein lies the tension of a fallen world. Though mankind has been offered redemptive salvation, they have the free choice of whether to accept it. This concept can be understood through the idea of the already but not yet. In other words, Christ has brought hope, redemption, and salvation, but mankind still lives in a broken world of pain and suffering resulting from the fall. Also, as L'Engle pointed out, each person still has a personal decision. They may either accept Jesus Christ and his salvation with a restored way of living, or continue to favor their own way. This choice furthers the cycle of suffering, which can indirectly cause the suffering of the innocent. Augustine's theology of the will explains that man has the freedom to turn to God, the supreme good, and the eternal life found there, or to turn away to anything else.⁷

Second to the idea of the already but not yet is the fact that, though Christians are redeemed heirs of God, they are still fallen creatures on earth waiting for the final restoration and

⁵ Ibid., 207.

⁶ Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water*, (New York: Doubleday Religious Publishing), 19.

⁷ Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, (New York: Random House), 147.

glory of Heaven. Thus, there is a daily choice to live for God and make his name known to the broken world, but also a longing for his final restoration. Wright explains this, saying, “What creation needs is neither abandonment nor evolution but rather redemption and renewal; and this is both promised and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is what the whole world’s waiting for.”⁸ Our call to make God known to the world is exemplified in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Just as Christ came with a ministry of reconciliation, so we are called to do the same.

This is manifest as an exhortation to the world to turn back to God. Taking this idea of a ministry and calling to the world further, a two-part exhortation exemplifies the Christian’s role in alleviating suffering. First, as mentioned above, is each person’s *imago Dei*, in that they reflect the image of God. Theologian Howard Best articulates the importance of this to daily living, saying, “...when the nobility of being made in the image of God is coupled to the humble and ordinary stuff of work, servanthood, and community, we come much closer to the truth.”⁹ This identity is translated into a caring for the world in a variety of ways. Secondly, Jesus Christ portrays a life and ministry of hope, healing, and alleviating the pain of mankind through his

⁸ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 107.

⁹ Howard Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, (New York: HarperOne) 17.

work and salvation. The holistic healing of the ministry of Christ extends to every aspect of human experience, starting with the greatest healing that can be given. His gift of salvation has brought healing through the forgiveness of sin, which brings total restoration with God and eternal life forevermore. This is the highest representation of complete healing, for Christ's salvation provides hope and the alleviation of eternal suffering. Furthermore, though, Christ did bring physical relief from suffering as well as emotional healing during his ministry on earth. In the same way, we are called to relieve suffering through alleviating physical suffering, bringing hope to the emotionally downtrodden, and the greatest healing through the salvation of Jesus Christ. In this way, we seek to live as he did with a complete ministry of hope and alleviation of suffering.

Considering both aspects of this calling, it could be considered a directive for every Christian to relieve suffering in the world. This is a specific charge within the broader mandate of *imago Dei*. As Schantz explains, "All of our human capacities receive their fundamental significance from our responsibility to God. In caring for the earth, we have the responsibility for using the arts and every other dimension of life for the glory of God and for the benefit of others."¹⁰ Armed with this understanding, how specifically does one use their life as a ministry of reconciliation?

The Utilization of Gifts

This question can be examined in light of spiritual gifts and talents. We all have the *imago Dei* Christ-follower identity and call to bring healing and hope, but each have unique gifts through which to do so. As L'Engle puts it, "And for each one of us there is a special gift, the way in which we may best serve and please the Lord, whose love is so overflowing."¹¹ Yet what

¹⁰ Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, 11.

¹¹ L'Engle, *Walking on Water*, 70.

does the Word of God say about this subject? To ascertain this, it is beneficial to look at scripture pertaining to spiritual gifts. 1 Peter 4:10-11 explains that,

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Peter makes several points about gifting in this passage. First of all, the unique gifts each person has been given provide a means by which to show God's grace to a broken world. This grace takes on various forms depending on the endowments. Second, these gifts have a charge to be used as God would use them, in order that he would receive the greatest glory. This is critical to understanding the correct purpose, charge, and way of using gifts in the world. Once again, the call to use these gifts to further the ministry of Jesus Christ is clear. It is a ministry of grace and reconciliation. The apostle Paul articulates this responsibility in a different way:

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.¹²

¹² Romans 12:4-8, NIV.

Once again, Paul emphasizes each person using their unique endowments in a way that honors God. From these scriptures, the call to use gifts for the glory of God is clear, leaving the responsibility to each person to ascertain, develop, and implement such gifts. Ultimately, these gifts should be used as ministers of reconciliation, sharing in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

There is a wide range of God-given talent, so for the purpose of this study, music will be the point of focus. Even within music, there are a wide range of gifts and ways of using them, including performing, teaching, composing, producing, church worship, and service. Each of these provides a viable way to use musical talent with great ministry and purpose. For this specific examination, holistic service in healthcare settings through the power of presence and therapeutic music will be the topic of study. This does not exalt it above other manifestations of utilizing talents in music, but rather provides one way of using music to bring hope, healing, and the reconciliation of Jesus Christ.

Healthcare: Meeting a Need

As Christ-following musicians, how can we practically use music to bring hope and healing to a broken world? What better place to consider such restoration than the hospitals and healthcare centers present in every population? In such a setting, each medical act and procedure is completed in the hope of curing, relieving pain, and bringing relief to those present, even if some pain is involved. Oftentimes hospitals might seem devoid of hope, especially after a terminal diagnosis or a painful procedure. Perhaps despair creeps in as the result of days spent surrounded by the same four walls, remembering times spent in sunshine and peace, happily working. Cicero recognized this pain and despair that surpasses even physical pain, explaining that, “Diseases of the soul are more dangerous and more numerous than those of the body.”¹³

¹³ Thomas Moore. *Care of the Soul in Medicine: Healing Guidance for Patients, Families, and the People who Care for Them*, (California: Hay House), 33.

Regardless of the patient's condition, all long to be free of the physical pain that binds them there, along with the emotional and spiritual pain that accompanies. Yet how can such suffering ever disappear, especially with chronic illness or life-altering injury? Perhaps it never will. However, one day at a time, relief can be found. Patients who are losing hope can find restoration, and those in great pain can find healing. What a demographic of people longing for holistic relief in body, mind, and spirit!

Within this specific setting, therapeutic music can provide healing and relief to a wide span of patient and diagnosis'. This range encompasses all of life from birth to death. From the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit all the way to palliative care, there are patients in pain struggling to heal. Music Practitioner Barbara Lepke-Sims explains this need:

In the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) a baby is stressed by the environment, whether that's cold temperatures, lighting, or procedures. Instead of the body putting forth energy to help it grow, it's using the energy to respond to the sympathetic nervous system, which induces stress. At Children's Hospital, I see all of these babies needing to grow, but with that stress, it's difficult. So my job is hopefully to help relieve that stress, allowing the baby to focus its energy on healing.¹⁴

This relief of stress to the body is true in other patient conditions, obviously varying on the specific needs of each patient. Regardless, there is room for helping to facilitate healing environments. This does not exclude other settings in which therapeutic music could relieve suffering, but simply narrows the focus for the purpose of this study. With this setting and patient need established, we can now examine the specifics of the effect, purpose, and presence of the musician and music.

¹⁴ Barbara Lepke-Sims, interview by author, Colorado Christian University School of Music, March 1, 2015.

Defining the Practice

With a closer look at therapeutic music and healing, it is beneficial to clarify the intent of the field. As of April 21, 2015, the National Standards Board of Therapeutic Musicians defines the practice as follows: “to use the intrinsic healing elements of live music and sound to provide an environment conducive to the human healing process.”¹⁵

It is necessary to note that the title of therapeutic musician or music practitioner refers to a musician who has undergone an additional certification program. This often includes practice, research, classroom and personal learning experiences, and a final practicum to meet the rigorous requirements for national certification. Oftentimes, people ask why a musician might not go into hospital rooms and play without certification as long as they are a skilled musician. While it is true that they would be able to play music, it is vital to have learned, practiced, and mastered how to play music *therapeutically*.

As Lepke-Sims explains,

In this current medical environment, the medical profession is recognizing and often requiring that the musician, who is planning to play in patient rooms, one-on-one, become certified to play by the bedside for patients. This ensures that the musician has been professionally trained to play appropriately for a variety of patient conditions. Entering a patient room, knowing the medical protocol, assessing the patient and then playing or singing therapeutically for that patient’s in-the-moment condition, takes training.¹⁶

¹⁵Melinda Gardiner. "Welcome to The National Standards Board for Therapeutic Musicians." National Standards Board for Therapeutic Musicians. January 1, 2015. Accessed April 21, 2015. <http://www.nsbtm.org/>.

¹⁶Barbara Lepke-Sims.

For the purpose of this paper, any reference to therapeutic musician assumes they have been trained and certified as a professional.

Understanding the correct definition of healing is critical to facilitating such care. Oftentimes, healing in the context of medicine can be misunderstood as curing. A distinction exists between the two, as healing applies to far more than physical vitality, rather encompassing the emotional and spiritual state of the patient as well.¹⁷ Much of western medicine is focused on curing. While not wrong in and of itself, oftentimes this can lead to an isolated, problem-focused response to illness. What if patients could be seen as whole beings? Perhaps when considering suffering and restoring hope, it is beneficial to see medicine as holistic and affecting the entire body. In the words of Thomas Moore, “It is crucial that medicine consider persons as made up of body, soul, and spirit, reuniting psyche and soma in a less abstract and mechanistic manner.”¹⁸

Understanding this holistic approach to medicine, how can healing be redefined to differentiate between whole-body healing versus the curing of illness? Sound researcher Joshua Leeds defines healing as “the process of regaining balance. Balance is in turn, the continuing development of equanimity.”¹⁹ L’Engle agrees with this definition: “If we are healed, we become whole; we are hale and hearty, we are holy.”²⁰ Curing is defined as being free of disease. A return to wholeness can be understood as regaining balance in all areas of the person; mind, body, and spirit. In therapeutic music, the focus is not on receiving a cure, but rather facilitating a healing environment. With this redefined understanding of healing within medicine and the

¹⁷ Bonnie Horrigan, “Therese Schroeder-Sheker Music Thanatology and Spiritual Care for the Dying,” *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* 7.1 (2001): 69, accessed April 21, 2015. <http://ezproxy.ccu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/204822443?accountid=10200>.

¹⁸ Moore, *Care of the Soul in Medicine*, 35.

¹⁹ Joshua Leeds, *The Power of Sound*, (Vermont: Healing Arts Press), 162.

²⁰ L’Engle, *Walking on Water*, 60.

purpose of therapeutic music, the question is *how* this physical, emotional, and spiritual healing happens for those who are suffering.

Physical Effects of Therapeutic Music

This search for the process of healing begins with the physical effects. However, in order to understand how therapeutic music relieves suffering, it is important to understand how music facilitates healing in the body. It is often mistakenly assumed that the music itself heals.

However, this is not the case. Lepke-Sims explains the way music heals a patient: “If their body is using all of its energy to fight off cold, stress, or the environment, it’s harder for the body to heal itself. So with the music, you create a place where the body can relax and focus on healing. To do so, you’re triggering the parasympathetic nervous system. What the music does is it helps the body relax so it can heal itself, which is a gift of God.”²¹ This is a critical distinction - therapeutic music creates an environment that relaxes the body so it can heal itself. The music is not actually healing the body, but rather relaxing the body and eliminating the stress.

With a better understanding of the word healing as used in the context of this paper, one must next consider how music can affect the whole person. First, how does live therapeutic music affect the physical systems of the body? Lepke-Sims summarizes the process: “In many ways, this is a matter of intentionality on the part of the musician. Every element of music must be carefully considered, whether this is entrainment (the rhythmic manifestation of resonance), tempo, or song choice.” Each element of music plays an integral role, especially when dealing with live sound.

This is a short but necessary clarification - according to the definition by the National Standards Board that was provided above, therapeutic music means utilizing the “intrinsic

²¹ Barbara Lepke-Sims.

healing elements of live music.” Live music provides a range of benefits that recorded music cannot. Oftentimes, healthcare settings question why they cannot simply play a soothing music station on the television or radio, such as Centura Health’s “Care Channel,” to create the same healing effects. However, as Fabien Maman, the founding father of sound vibration therapy, expounds, live acoustic music contains overtones with a natural wave and resonance that electric sounds lack.²² In recorded music, the range of overtones are compromised. On the other hand, the progression of an acoustic sound naturally swells, rings, then quietly fades, creating a response and connection in the body through this vibration that analog sounds could never replicate. The resonance echoes in the space between the notes, as “healing happens in the space between the sounds, not the sound itself. Less is more.”²³ It seems a live, acoustic, highly-portable instrument such as the harp provides a key to effective therapeutic music.

Examining the acoustic importance of instruments in therapeutic music raises several questions. What physical effect does the vibration of the strings have on a patient, and how does this improve their state and well-being? The concept of resonance in vibration provides an answer. Wherever life and breath exists throughout creation, so does resonance, the natural frequency of an object. Where any steady rhythm beats, it emits its own unique resonance. Thus, every human body has a rhythm and vibration emitted from its body systems at work, with their speed regulated by the heartbeat. In a more obvious and musical way, the harp has a rhythm and vibration to every song played, with the tempo regulated by the harpist. Sarajane Williams, psychologist and editor of the *Harp Therapy Journal*, articulates the body’s response to

²² Maman, *Tao of Sound*, (Czech Republic: Tamo Do Academy), 91.

²³ *Ibid.*, 110.

resonance: “We resonate with all sound. A note enters the body like a pebble into water. As our bodies are mostly water, sound ripples through our bodies easily.”²⁴

Yet how does this response to resonance and vibration relate to effective therapeutic music? The recently researched field of entrainment provides a solution. Leeds explains the process of entrainment, where a system actively changes the vibrations of another object to a different rate.²⁵ In healthcare situations, this process presents a way to calm, relax, and regulate a patient’s vital systems. For example, if a patient experiences a high amount of pain and agitation, their heart rate increases due to this pain, and their discomfort worsens. In this situation, a therapeutic musician can match the heart rate of patient with the tempo of their music, and gradually lower the rate to somewhere between 60-80 beats per minute, which is the natural, at-rest human heart rate, and in doing so bring the patient’s heart rate down through matching the tempo of this music. As the stronger pulse, the harp music calms the heart rate through entrainment.

For entrainment to work, though, Leeds insists that the process must follow three rules: First, the Rule of Resonance, that both systems can achieve the same rate by having a similar range of frequencies and an ability to follow or create frequencies. For example, both the acoustic instrument and the body can produce and copy exact beat rates. Second, the Rule of Power, in that one system must have enough strength to overcome the second through a close proximity and volume. For example, a harp played close by a patient’s bed in a small hospital room produces a stronger beat than the body’s nearly inaudible heartbeat. Third, the Rule of

²⁴ Julia Duin, “Plucking Heartstrings,” *Insight on the News* 19 Apr. 1999. <http://ezproxy.ccu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/205895841?accountid=10200>.

²⁵ Joshua Leeds, *The Power of Sound*, (Vermont: Healing Arts Press), 42.

Consistency explains that one system must maintain a constant frequency. In this case, the harpist must play a consistent beat for the body's heart rate to recognize and match it.²⁶

In addition to resonance and entrainment, the timbre and pitch of a note greatly affects a patient's body tension. Strong, long-lasting notes in the lower register calm and relax the nervous system, decreasing stress. On the other hand, weaker, shorter notes in the higher register excite the nervous system, and this aroused state easily leads to stress or anxiety. According to Dr. Daleen Aragon, the higher pitches are often associated with tension, while lower pitched notes cause relaxation and act as a de-stressor. In addition, the soft or loud dynamics strongly affect a patient's anxiety, with tests showing that the majority of people found relaxation through soft music compared to loud.²⁷

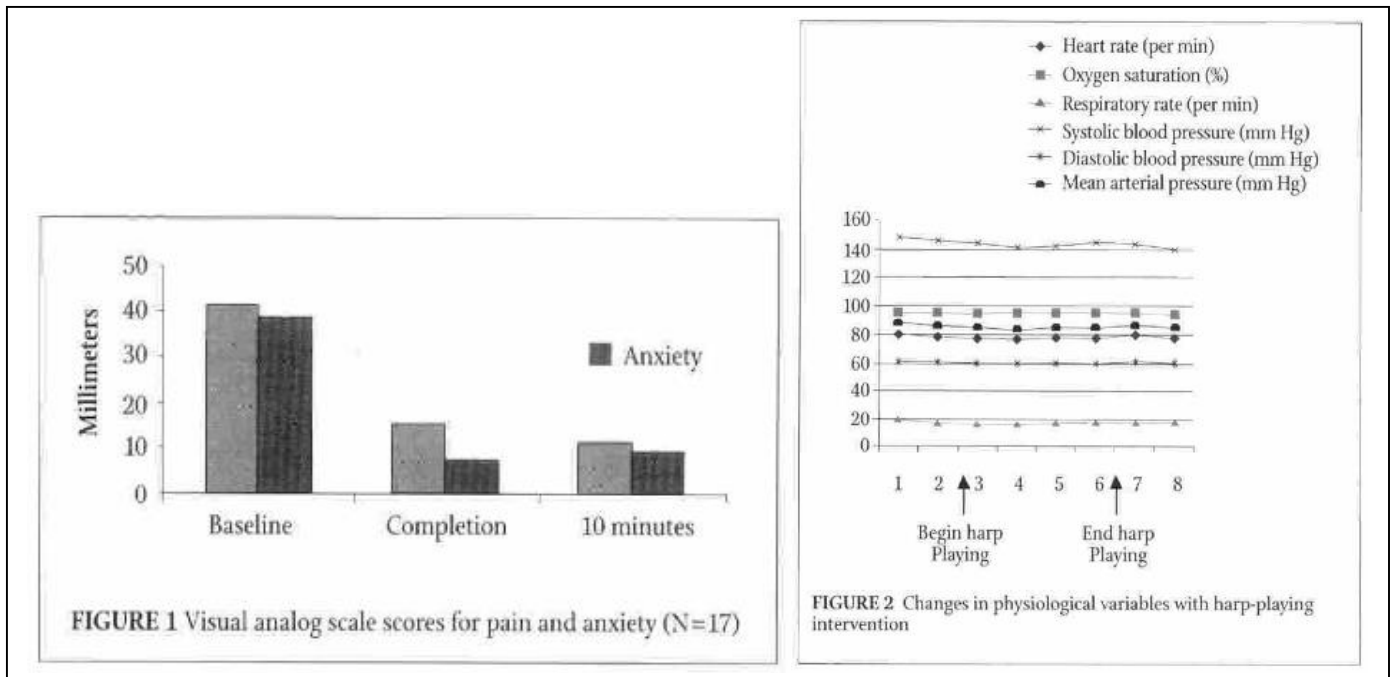
While all of these therapeutic techniques create a healing and calming response in a patient, it would seem that a combination of entrainment, low-register, and soft pitches achieves the most powerful effect. In a clinical study on the effects of harp music on vascular and thoracic surgery patients, results indicated a clinically significant change in physiological variables and an average of 25-29 millimeter change in pain scores on the Visual Analog Scale (100 mm total) for patients after a therapeutic harp session. As a result, there was a drop in drug and morphine use in patients after experiencing this type of therapeutic music.²⁸ Below are visual aids to illustrate these results. On the Visual Analog scale in figure 1, pain is scored on a 100 millimeter

²⁶ Ibid., 43.

²⁷ Daleen Aragon, "The Effects of Music in Vascular and Thoracic Surgical Patients," *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* 8 no. 5, (2002): 52-60, 53-54, accessed April 21, 2015, <http://ezproxy.ccu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/204823109?accountid=10200>.

²⁸ Joshua Simon, "A Song For the Dying" *U.S. Catholic* 65.12 (2000): 39, accessed April 21, 2015, <http://ezproxy.ccu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/225352437?accountid=10200>.

scale, with 0 defined as no pain, and 100 being intolerable. Lower scores are desired for patient pain management. Figure 2 graphs the changes in variables before and after music.



As patients and their families often express trepidation over large amounts of painkillers, the effect of the music can provide an alternative, natural relief from the pain. This is one way that a musician can provide a natural, God-given method for relief from physical suffering through relaxing the body and allowing it to heal itself.

Emotional Effects of Therapeutic Music

Having explored the bodily effects of therapeutic music in relation to suffering, what of the soul? How does therapeutic music relieve emotional suffering? Whether through a simple distraction from the pain or all the way to preparation for hospice care, a patient receives peace and heart-healing through the soft notes and soothing songs. The emotional effects of therapeutic music are improvement of a patient's mood, quality of life, and a resulting restoration of lost hope.

Even in healthy people, music improves quality of life through addressing the specific needs of each person, whether providing distraction, calming anxiety, lifting a mood, or helping with a transition.²⁹ These effects are increased even more with patients who are in hospice or have high anxiety and pain, as they provide a safe place to relax, rest, and experience peace. The emotional response created by the music can help patients recall and resolve feelings long repressed or un-accessed. Also, the songs can serve as a means for the patient to forget about machines, pain, and sadness and remember (or perhaps look forward to) a better time.

Researcher Karen Shipley points out that the last sensation that terminally-ill patients process is sound, and thus, the opportunity for music.³⁰ Especially when the music comes from a calming, peaceful instrument such as the harp, those sounds can help to gently, gracefully usher an individual into eternity or soothe their entire being in a coma, sedated, or high anxiety state. This can be especially beneficial for psychologically or cognitively impaired patients. As Dr. Aragon explains, “harp music, along with other toning techniques, allows the patient to unbind from the physical body and literal time and move more peacefully towards transition.”³¹ This transition can be in the form of death, recovery, or a return to wholeness. The Bible speaks to this effect, as 1 Samuel 16 tells of David, the young shepherd and future king of Israel who played his harp to calm sheep and a demon-plagued king. King Saul called in David to play his harp and send away the evil presence that tormented him. The text implies that this happened several times, and the music effectively calmed and provided safety and peace to the weary and beleaguered king. It would seem that the harp acted as a vessel to bring the authority, presence, and tranquility of the Lord.

²⁹Karen Shipley, “Music Therapy In End-of-Life Care.” *Baltimore Jewish Times* 27. Apr. 2007. <http://ezproxy.ccu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/222777483?accountid=10200>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Aragon, *Effects of Music*, 56.

Just like with King Saul, this return to wholeness often results in new hope. Away from home and in an uncomfortable environment for days on end, patients can easily lose sight of life and their desire to thrive. Through improving their quality of life as outlined above, a patient has the chance to see beyond their circumstances to a better tomorrow. This can change their mood and perspective on their entire hospital experience. In fact, this is a key reason why healthcare centers began employing music therapists and music practitioners. Lepke-Sims explains, “There is a growing trend amongst hospitals to hire therapeutic musicians and other practitioners of complementary modalities to contribute to the overall experience of the patient because of the ‘healing care environment’ they help to create. Many hospitals are finding that this additional intervention can be a differentiator in the public’s perception of their care.”³² Therapeutic music can effect a patient’s outlook on their entire hospital experience, changing their perspective. Thus, therapeutic music brings emotional healing through this lifting of the spirit, bringing hope for the present circumstances as well as pointing to the future.

While the harp music has a deep effect on the patient, what about the family? When a musician plays a therapeutic session, family members are often present and listen as well. While not the main audience, they too experience the calming and peaceful effects of the music. Stressed and worried about their loved one who is ill, they are trying to balance hospital visits, conversations with insurance and the medical staff, and keeping the rest of their life together. As a result, the family is often physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted as well. The music provides a much needed space where they can sit, close their eyes, and take a breath from the stress for a few minutes. Though they are not the first person the music is meant for, they still receive the holistic healing and hope that the music brings, just like the patient.

³² Lepke-Sims, *Confluence*, 50.

Oftentimes, this creates a connection between the musician and the family, even without a spoken relationship, especially when the harpist has helped the loved one experience an improved, graceful passing. At St. Anthony's Hospital in Lakewood, CO, I was referred by a nurse to play during an end-of-life do-not-resuscitate situation. As the family said goodbye and the chaplain led a prayer, I played low, arrhythmic soothing music. As the patient passed, I continued playing, staying with the family afterwards during the grieving process.³³ During this process, music can help the family grieve, heal, and transition to a new stage just like the patient. This is just one emotional effect of therapeutic music, as the hope it provides can also lift a patient's mood, calm their anxiety, and help them see past the present discomfort to the potential of the future.

Spiritual Care

Understanding these emotional needs that are met through therapeutic music, what about the spirit? Can therapeutic music bring spiritual relief? Without even speaking a word, a therapeutic musician can minister in a unique and powerful way through the soothing resonances, unlocking responses in a patient they could never have accessed otherwise. Music itself has received association with God and heaven, and can conjure divine thoughts in a patient's mind that result in comfort, prayer, and connection.³⁴ Through the effects of the music, the musician creates a connection with the patient that facilitates a deep spiritual response. Having made this claim, though, it is important to examine scripture in relation to the significance of therapeutic music.

³³ Personal Testimony, March 26th, 2015 SAH.

³⁴ Lucanne Magill, "Music Therapy and Spirituality and the Challenges of End-Stage Illness," (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers), 175.

Throughout the Bible, the power of music is clear. As explained earlier, the shepherd boy David played the harp and calmed the evil spirit that tormented King Saul in 1 Samuel 16. Clearly, therapeutic music is a vessel of the Lord to bring power and authority in the spiritual realm. In another portion of scripture, 2 Chronicles 20, musical instruments, including the harp, went ahead of the Israelite army into battle.³⁵ Acting as a proclamation of the Lord and his people, these instruments might have acted as weapons in a spiritual sense. In both these passages, the music served as spiritual authority and had the ability to push back darkness or pain and proclaim the Lord's victory and peace. Could it not do the same in a patient's room, to a person weary and heavy-laden by pain, fear, and the uncertainty of the future?

In addition to this spiritual power and significance, a certain joy and serenity seems to come from music as it plays the songs of God that lifts the soul and brings hope. Psalm 137 outlines that the Israelites hung their harps upon the trees, and would not play for their Babylonian captors who demanded songs of joy.³⁶ Clearly, the harp was an instrument used for songs of life and joy, and both the Israelites and Babylonians knew the positive and pleasing effect of the music. Thus, the captives would not give their tormentors that peace, joy, and enjoyment. Additionally, many psalms mention the harp and music in a positive sense as a means of bringing songs of praise unto the Lord, such as Psalm 33 and 150.

While the era and setting of the music has certainly changed since those ancient days, both the basics of the music and the nature of the Lord has not. Therefore, the harp can bring that same peace and joy to suffering patients today. Music played with intentionality still carries the same power and presence of God and ability to push back suffering and darkness even in a twenty-first century hospital and hospice room.

³⁵ 2 Chron. 20. 21-22

³⁶Ps. 137. 1-8

Understanding this spiritual effect, it is clear that therapeutic music provides a different kind of care than words; in many ways, the songs give without requiring anything in return. Chaplain Theresa Helldorfer of the Denver Hospice explains that music can remove pressure to respond, freeing people to simply experience the moment.³⁷ When partnered with the spiritual support hospitals offer through a chaplaincy program, therapeutic music can act as a gateway or catalyst for conversation and connection. At a local hospital in Denver, CO, a cancer patient was deteriorating rapidly. I was asked by a chaplain to come play, and a few moments into the therapeutic session, the chaplain joined and spoke with the patient as I played music. As the chaplain explained to me later, the music relaxed the patient and initiated a response in the patient that allowed the chaplain to minister. Even in subjects or emotions that had been previously unreachable, the music softened and opened the patient's heart.³⁸ Additionally, the music can reach patients who might have lost the ability to comprehend words spoken by a chaplain. Especially for far-deteriorated patients quickly approaching death, music can be one of the final ways to reach and touch their consciousness when their word comprehension is no longer neurologically possible.³⁹ Thus, if a patient has reached a coma or brain-deteriorated state, music can still process and impact their physical and emotional state. Therese Schroeder-Sheker, a leading pioneer in therapeutic music, explains that the music affects everyone, even those who are unconscious, as "the entire skin serves as an extension of the ear."⁴⁰

Truly, where else can one find a medical modality that touches both a patient's body and soul? Of course, the extent of the effects can vary considerably from one patient to the next, but regardless, the music provides the opportunity for a connection to all three aspects of their being.

³⁷ Hollis, *Music*, 117.

³⁸ Personal Testimony, SAN Hospital, September 2014.

³⁹ Jennifer Hollis, *Music at the End of Life*, (California: ABC-CLIO, LLC), 116.

⁴⁰ Simon, "Song," 39.

Physically, the technical side of playing, such as entrainment and low calming pitches, can calm a body and ease pain. Emotionally, the heart, feeling, and depth of many genres of music can touch and calm a patient's emotional state. Spiritually, music can provide for the final aspect of a person by addressing or helping uncover the patient's spiritual needs. This final spiritual aspect of patient care completes the effects of music on the body, and can help a person find spiritual comfort, hope and rest in addition to the physical and emotional. McCullum professes that the three aspects of a human being, physical, spiritual, and emotional, have a connection found through therapeutic music, and that the three lose balance when that connection doesn't receive emphasis.⁴¹ However, is such a connection of these three aspects of being enough to provide true holistic care?

The Power of Presence

Does anything separate a Christian musician providing therapeutic music from a non-Christian providing the same music with the same training? As clarified above, the Christian would certainly better understand an imago Dei Christ-follower mandate, but would the non-Christian even understand or have the identity to relieve suffering? Perhaps, as they are made in the image of God, feeling compassion for the hurt. However, could they bring true, complete relief from suffering in the example of Christ if they did not know or accept him as Lord of their life? Writer Madeleine L'Engle answers this question in relation to wholeness: "By his wounds we are healed. But they are our wounds too, and until we have been healed we do not know what wholeness is."⁴² However, it is important to clarify that even we as Christians are still in the process of being healed and daily renewed by the grace of God. His grace is manifest in us regardless of our own intent through the incarnation of Jesus Christ in our lives. That said, could

⁴¹ Hollis, *Music*, 115.

⁴² L'Engle, *Walking on Water*, 74.

he who has not been rescued from sin, the greatest brokenness, bring holistic healing to another? With the understanding that Christ provided holistic relief from suffering in body, mind, and spirit through the hope of his salvation, could someone who has not personally his eternal life show its hope to the world in a true sense?

This can be understood through the idea of the power of presence. We as Christ-followers have been given a new presence that dwells in our hearts. As Romans 5:5 explains, “Hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” The Spirit of God dwells inside of us. This is the kingdom of God coming to earth. As Jesus explains to the Pharisees, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”⁴³ In the same way, we are the salt and light to the world, bringing the truth and hope for which they long. Jesus explains our identity: “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”⁴⁴ In a world of darkness, the light of Christ shines in us. As musicians and ministers of reconciliation, we bring this light through his presence as we minister to the broken through the gifts he has given to us.

Not only that, the Holy Spirit actively intercedes on our behalf: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself

⁴³ Luke 17:20-21

⁴⁴ Matthew 5:14-16.

intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."⁴⁵

In other words, as redeemed people who have the Holy Spirit within us, we bring that presence into each place we go. The kingdom of God has come, and is present as we continue the ministry of Christ on this earth. In a place of great need such as a hospital room, the Holy Spirit can intercede for patients even if we do not fully understand their complete physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Ultimately, the hope of his salvation brought through Jesus Christ is the complete expression of relief from suffering. As his *imago Dei* followers, we bring the hope of that salvation through our presence and music.

Going beyond the presence of the musician alone, what of the element of prayer? It is a deeply significant and distinctive aspect of the power of presence. When a Christ-following musician enters a hospital room and assesses the patient's condition and holistic needs, he is able to not only adjust his music for the patient, but also can intercede to God on that patient's behalf. This brings a deeper level of intentionality and service. It is not simply playing music to meet a physical need, but rather fully dedicating oneself in body, mind, and spirit, in gifting, thoughts, and focus, to the service of another. Just as the healing is holistic, so the musician must be holistically present! Christ-following music practitioners who currently work in healthcare settings should emphasize the power of presence and prayer as a critical, significant element of their work in therapeutic music. Faced with human suffering directly before them in a hospital room, they are not only playing, but are able to intercede in a specific way for the needs present. To them, it is the true representation of being fully present themselves as healers and human beings, as they are holistically engaging their own selves.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Romans 8:26-27

⁴⁶ Barbara Lepke-Sims.

To focus and pray for the patient to this extent, music practitioners play from the heart. That may necessitate playing from memory, simple chord charts, or outside practice for skilled playing. This familiarity and practice allows them to be present mentally to intercede for the patient through prayer. Like any musician, preparation and practice provides the freedom for expression. Personally, my approach is to memorize and play without any music, as it frees me to see and connect with the patient. However, other practitioners just as effectively serve and intercede for patients while using music through practice and familiarity of music.

Recently, I was playing for a woman that was highly distressed physically, crying and screaming about her pain. The nurse had asked for music, as the pain medication did not appear to be calming the patient down. As I started playing, I also silently prayed for the patient and her evident need. Almost immediately, the screaming stopped. Several minutes later, she stopped crying. I kept playing appropriate music to match the patient, but also adjusted my intercession, praying that the patient would fully calm down and rest or sleep. Several moments after that, the patient fell asleep. Her heart rate lowered significantly during the session, changing from 97 to 64 BPM, and her oxygen saturation level went up to 97%, a percentage within the normal range.⁴⁷ Prayer is the difference between a purely musical focus and true, holistic dedication to bringing relief from suffering. With the presence of God and the intentional prayers of the Christ-following musician, suffering patients may find holistic healing.

Ultimately, God works as he pleases. He can choose to work through a music practitioner regardless of their intentionality, prayer, or style. God's sovereignty transcends our power or understanding. He does not need us to complete his healing and ministry, yet he graciously chooses to give us a role. I might come into the hospital, stressed and preoccupied with family

⁴⁷ Personal testimony, March 8th, 2015, Saint Anthony's North Hospital.

matters or worries about the day, and not be focused on the patient as I play. However, oftentimes the patient will still be moved deeply and respond to the music. God works through our music regardless of our contribution. Truly, the spirit of Jesus Christ is the culmination of the power of presence. That said, it is still vital for the music practitioner to be a responsible steward of the circle of influence and ministry that God has given.

Summarizing Holistic Benefits

Understanding the power of presence in relation to the Holy Spirit and Prayer, we can finally answer the question, “How does holistic healing truly happen in the context of therapeutic music?” As clarified above, the eternal salvation of Jesus Christ is the foundation for this healing. The hope of a restored eternity brings a peace, comfort, and restoration of the soul to which little else compares. Furthermore, the relaxation of the body through therapeutic music provides physical relief from suffering. Emotionally, therapeutic music can provide hope and perspective beyond the immediate circumstances, relieving the suffering of the mind. Spiritually, a therapeutic musician brings the Holy Spirit and the intentional focus in music and prayer. This can lead to long-lasting effects of relief from spiritual suffering of despair and hopelessness. Thus, as imago Dei Christ-Followers, we can bring holistic healing in a greater way through our trained talents, presence, and prayer, truly serving a patient and pointing them to the ultimate hope and healing found in Jesus Christ. He is the greatest hope to the hopeless and healing to the hurting.

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