

Music and Medicine

by Jefferey A. Becker, Pastor
Calvary Baptist Church
Corning, New York

Ed's note: *The following is not a carefully or thoroughly crafted review of either available research or Biblical theology. However, the subject is sufficiently important to introduce it here with the possibility that someone will develop the treatise that is needed on this subject.*

What did David do to "refresh" Saul? Play music (I Samuel 16:23)!

What did Martin Luther do to "drive the Devil away?" Sing hymns!

"When sadness comes to you... then say, 'Come, I must play our Lord Christ a song... If the Devil returns... defend yourself and play to my Lord Christ... sing the Devil down until you learn to despise him.'"

What do some physicians prescribe to alleviate symptoms of Parkinson's disease? Play music. "Dr. Oliver Sachs discovered an extraordinarily effective treatment for Parkinson's - MUSIC. Sachs discovered that many Parkinson's patients responded to music."'

There is evidence for the positive benefits of music. Dr. Mary Lockett performed experiments on rats in Australia. When subjected to noise, the rats perished. Dr. Adam Knieste notes that "Music... is really a powerful drug ...mellow tones can relax you." He was so convinced that he produced a record called "Sound Sleep" to ease sleep and reduce tension.;

While the effects of music are portrayed in both Scripture and research, they find a relatively small place in medical practice and church ministry to individuals. Perhaps this article will contribute to the correction of this omission in both areas of helping people. Augustine believed men heard not individual notes, but rather (utilizing memory) whole lines.' Clearly, reflection on the nature of man from the Scripture, enabled Augustine to

suggest what experimentation would not discover for centuries. Robert Jourdain correlates music with pleasure and pain. "If (Dr. Knieste's) theories ever become popular... the drug industry will suffer tremendously, since the need for narcotics, sedatives, (and) tranquilizers will substantially diminish. As a consequence, many famous research centers refuse to test his theories."

As Christians, our final authority is always the Word of God. Certainly, if the Lord indicates that music plays a medical role, we should not shrink from it. While research is not required to confirm Scripture, its consistency does add to the positive impetus for its directives.

The Old Testament presents several examples of connections between music and moods producing medicinal benefits. Cited above, I Samuel 16:23 indicates that Saul was refreshed (Hebrew: breathe freely or revive) and well (Hebrew: good in the widest sense) as a result of David's music. II Chronicles 20:19 narrates how Jehoshaphat and Judah were stimulated to heroic deeds by singing and praising. What would be the results if surgeons played music to enhance the strength and courage of patients in the operating room and after surgery?

Proverbs 15:13 teaches that a merry (Hebrew: blithe, gleeful) heart makes a cheerful countenance. Proverbs 17:22 says that a merry heart (same word) does good like medicine (Hebrew: remove a bandage from a wound, heal, or cure). Christians might pioneer here. If there are televisions in every hospital room, why not good music? Proverbs 25:20 at first glance, appears contradictory, by disallowing singing songs to those who are depressed. Yet, perhaps, God is commending caution. Music is not a panacea, prescribe cautiously!

The New Testament has its own prescriptions of music. It is probable that Jesus sang before Gethsemane (Mark 14:26), not only because it was part of the Passover, but also to boost His spirits contemplating Calvary? When Paul and Silas were imprisoned (Acts 16:25), they sang praises to God. Since their stripes were not treated until later (Acts 16:33), perhaps the melody functioned, not just as adoration, but anesthetically?

Then, there is the pivotal passage of James 5:13-16. Most Christians, when afflicted and hospitalized, summon their pastor to come to their bedside and pray, as this text clearly commends. But, how many sing psalms or other Christian music which is mentioned here. Are we not being selective by picking and choosing from the instructions of this passage?

The book of Revelations is full of music. Chapters 4 and 5 show that the redeemed and the angels join in adoring God in song eternally. If music is perceived as part of a perfected environment (c£ Isaiah 12:2,5 where songs about the LORD echo throughout the earth), shouldn't music reverberate in the corridors of our corrupted world now?

I confess my own sins of omission. Our mid-wife encouraged my wife to play music during labor. I had never thought of it! We also forgot to take music with us for our second son's birth. Later, music enabled my wife to undergo several hours of heavy labor without any medication in the birth of our daughter.

I recently spoke to one of my mentors about the role of music in this birth. He told me of a church member who had come to him with lingering bad moods and depression. As a pastor, he recommended the purchase of a portable cassette player and some quality Christian music and to play it when he was distressed. Within a month, the sufferer reported that his spirits had revived, and without medication!

The question is compelling, "What role can music play medically and spiritually in the ministries of both physicians and pastors?" I am convinced that a potent influence directly and indirectly has been neglected for too long.

References

1. Edwin Plass, *What Luther Says*, (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), pp. 098103.
2. Jourdain, Robert; *Music, The Brain, and Ecstasy*, (New York: Avon Books, 1998), p. 301.
3. Cole, Basil; *Pastoral Reflections on Rock Music*; "The Wanderer"; July 12, 1979. Taken from "Christian News Encyclopedia"; Volume II, pp. 13861387.
4. "Family Weekly"; January 30, 1983.
5. Clark, Gordon; *The Incarnation*, (Jefferson, Maryland: Trinity Foundation, 1988), pp. 39-40.
6. The Wanderer.