
“Make music in your heart”

The gift of music

One of the most powerful and enjoyable gifts God has given mankind is the gift of music. The subject of music is so vast, that we could not possibly touch on all its benefits here, but will limit our thoughts to the subject of “care through music”.

Sadly, communal singing isn’t something that is very cool these days – in fact is becoming less and less popular. There are however many spiritual and therapeutic benefits of singing together.

Many of you would’ve heard of the bonding chemical Oxytocin. Oxytocin is a hormone/chemical that is made in the brain (the hypothalamus). It is transported to, and secreted by the pituitary gland, which is located at the base of the brain. Very basically, Oxytocin makes us sociable creatures, it bonds mothers to babies, friends, couples and remarkably, people who sing together!

The healing power of music

Having worked in the music industry for 25 years I have witnessed over and over again the healing benefits of music, particularly in the aged care industry. So often, in aged care facilities, I am presented with an audience/group of sad, depressed and listless people. But equally as often, at the end of our hour together, the same group of people are smiling, bright and happy. Sometimes some of the able bodied will even hop up for a dance together, the atmosphere is completely different! I can only put this down to the healing power of music!! It produces the flow of Oxytocin which creates happy memories and a sense of well-being and attachment that, if I were to stand and only talk to the same audience, would not have the same effect. Some nursing facilities are so convinced that the therapeutic effects of music are so



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good for their residents, that they are dispensing or reducing antidepressant drugs and instead, are customising music to each resident i.e. they work with family and friends to put together a song list that the resident remembers and enjoys.

Music in worship

If all these therapeutic activities are true for secular music, then it is equally true for our music of worship. God has given us music as an integral part of our worship to him. Also, God doesn't just want us to sing to him – he wants us to sing to and for one another.

Hymn 357 is a classic example of this. It's all a part of our mental and spiritual care for each other.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Galatians 3:16

Through music we are able to express feeling and emotions which mere speech cannot do. Furthermore, singing is the medium we have to gain a sense of unity and togetherness, which to God, is surely a delightful expression of our united love for him.

Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Psalm 100:1-2

Because he knows our frame and what our mental, emotional and spiritual needs are, God has given us psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, through which we are able to bind together and express “one unifying voice” of praise.

God loves unity, and communal singing is a way to achieve that purpose. This is evident in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Ephesians 5:19

Ephesians 5 is ALL about unity and in so doing caring for each other

Unity of the ecclesia
Unity of husbands and wives
Unity of Christ's body

The right music in the right context, has an incredible ability to bind together. When the disciples sang a hymn together with Christ before leaving for the Mt of Olives – it must've

been for Christ, one of the most heartfelt hymns ever sung, and one which he felt truly united with all of his disciples.

As far as God is concerned it matters not whether you can sing nicely or not –

Someone might have the best voice in the world - but it's of no value, if their heart isn't singing to God as well.

Or, you might not be able to sing well at all – but your heart could be full of tune and praise to God as Ephesians 5:19 suggests.

Emotional and physical response

Music is a mind-altering activity; it has both conscious and subconscious effects upon us. Generally speaking, the effect of music is first **psychological then physiological**, i.e. our brains will dictate a physical response. Given some circumstances, you might find yourself wanting to cry during a hymn or song which may not necessarily be the words, but in fact the music. Or a combination of both.

As we certainly have a wonderful gift from God in that we have an opportunity to praise him for all his blessings and works with us, whilst at the same time a great responsibility to take care that all our music of worship is not only sincere but based on truth as well.

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