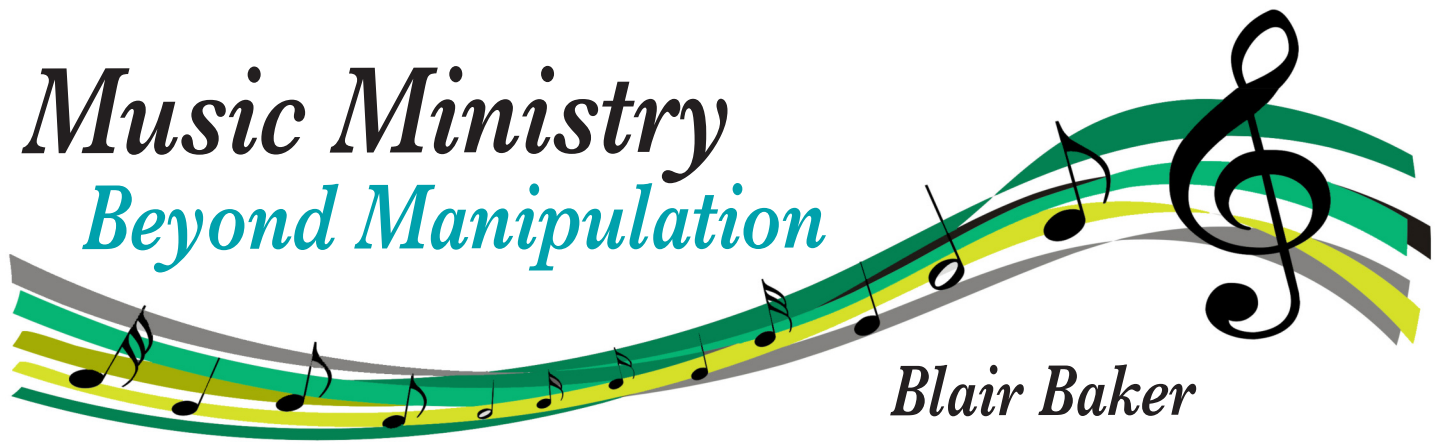


Music Ministry Beyond Manipulation



Blair Baker

Music has such great power! It can inspire, focus, guide, comfort, depress and uplift us. Music can help us express the full range of human experiences and emotions. Melody has an enormous effect on people—while it can stir wonder and joy in some, it can depress and turn the stomach of another. Some people have been so damaged by their experience of church that any association with a certain style of music can remind them of painful memories.

I know people who refuse to go to certain church services because the music is repetitive and doesn't proclaim the good news of the gospel. Then there are those from more lively church backgrounds who find more subdued musical environments to be dry, or feel the way the congregation sings the old, classic hymns to be lackluster. They feel there is no way for the Spirit to move or flow in those situations. What drives our approach and reactions to worship music?

MANIPULATIVE MUSIC

Music speaks to our hearts and is a wonderful expression of

worship and praise, but it can also be a tool to manipulate if we are not focused on leading our thoughts towards God rather than ourselves. Certain churches use particular guitar chord patterns and repetitive rhythms in order to induce a state of openness. They believe this altered state of consciousness invites the Holy Spirit in to grant worshippers gifts of the Spirit—speaking in tongues, seeing

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visions and many falling over in trance-like states.

I took guitar lessons from a man who used to play in a well-known church. He told me about the expanded chord patterns they used in order to manipulate worshippers' emotions. I have attended some of these churches and found it easy to get carried away with the music. Using repetitive lyrics and music to induce a trance-like state can be highly manipulative. The use of music is so powerful, and like any

gift of God, we must be careful how we use it.

But music can also be a wonderful tool to help us remember Bible verses, encourage us and help us better understand the gospel. When I first started my commitment to Jesus as a teenager, I was inspired and helped by the music of artists like Keith Green and Amy Grant. Now I truly appreciate Taize style worship. I listen to

Taize music at home and it helps me focus my mind on prayer and focuses my heart on God. I find some popular Christian music too syrupy for my taste and they strike a bad chord with my past experiences in some churches.

SONGS OF COMFORT

I also love the old classics *Amazing Grace*, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, and the like. I took to memorizing hymns years ago in order to have at hand the gospel and ways to pray and sing

at all times. It has been a tremendous blessing that just when I needed a particular song, it was there.

I remember one such experience from a few years back, when Russell, a dear friend in his eighties, lay in hospital dying (in fact, he died the following day). I went to visit him, but he was in a shared ward with no walls—an appalling situation. So I just lay my head next to him and sang the hymns quietly while he struggled to breathe. As I sang, tears flowed from his eyes. He couldn't speak. I sang *Amazing Grace*, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* and *Abide with Me*. All I could do was utter these hushed hymns of comfort in song to my friend, who could no longer speak and was nearing the end. I sang quietly because there were others in the room who were fit and well, looking on from other beds.

OF GRACE AND MERCY

Here is the most amazing thing! When I sang *Abide with Me*, I noticed Russell start to mouth the words with me. At his funeral, *Just as I Am* was sung. Afterwards, the woman who helped arrange the funeral spoke with me, and I asked her about the song choice. She told me that Russell had wanted to have *Abide with Me* sung at the funeral, but that she and others felt it was too somber.

Can you imagine what my heart did at that moment? It turns out *Abide with Me* was actually Russell's favorite song and that's why he wanted it sung at his funeral, but I never knew that. That's why it was so amazing. I am still moved to this day knowing how our good Lord comforted my dear friend and brother with his favorite hymn the day before he passed. That's our kind and loving Lord whose "mercies are new morning by morning."

At the end of the day, I think we need to extend grace to each other even as we sing different types of worship songs and be tolerant of others' choices. Perhaps when we think of the music we are sharing as worship leaders (I've led worship in an Anglican church and for children's church too), we can encourage people to deeply think about the words they are singing. We can suggest that they find some hymns they enjoy and start to memorize them too, so they can sing those words whenever or wherever they feel the need. May worshipful words and music be a blessing through us all to others. □

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THE TRUTH ABOUT CONDEMNATION

BRAD JERSAK (continued from page 7)

Second, we reject any theory of *atonement* that says God *cannot* freely forgive, that God is *beholden* to wrath and that our release depends on the *appeasement* of God's anger through the violent punishment of his Son. That is a paganized perversion of biblical judicial terms. In other words, my theological revulsion is not to legal terms such as *katakrima* per se, but rather, to deriving from them blasphemous conceptions of God that require a brutal child sacrifice (his own) to assuage his holy fury before he can "forgive." That's not forgiveness at all! That ugly narrative is more accurately aligned with the false god Molech (see Jeremiah 32:35).

I reject the dominant modern gospel of retribution preached from so many pulpits across our continent—the same bad news message I once preached. When I saw through Christ's life and teachings that God is not a condemning judge, but rather, a consistently loving Father, I was able to move toward a more beautiful, ancient and yes, more biblical gospel. □

Brad Jersak is the author of A More Christlike God and A More Christlike Way, published by CWR press.

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"God our Father, we find it difficult to come to you, because our knowledge of you is imperfect. In our ignorance of you, we have imagined you to be our enemy; we have wrongly thought that you take pleasure in punishing our sins; and we have foolishly conceived you to be a tyrant over human life. But since Jesus came among us, he has shown that you are loving, that you are on our side against all that stunts life, and that our resentments against you are groundless."

—Augustine of Hippo