

Music

MUSIC PLAYS AN IMPORTANT PART in the life of young believers. Inside most individuals is an inborn need and desire for some type of music. Today's world offers much harmful music to tempt the child of God. God, however, hears the prayers of His own and also offers good and healthy music choices to help the young believer. On these youth pages, young believers in Rockford, Minn. share experiences and report on a recent youth discussion held in their congregation on the topic of music choices and their effect on the life of a young believer. Lisa Ylitalo, a Rockford congregation member, coordinated the material for these pages.

INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANT QUESTION

WHAT DOES THIS MUSIC AWAKEN IN ME?

At a Rockford congregation youth discussion in January 2008, Minneapolis pastor Keith Waaraniemi presented *Music and its Effect on the Young Believer*, at the request of Rockford's Youth Committee. In the following interview, youth page coordinator, Lisa Ylitalo, asks Waaraniemi about this presentation and the topic of music:

1. The line between wholesome and unhealthy music has become blurred. Even though music may contain acceptable words or an innocent melody, this doesn't necessarily mean it's fit for a believer. What advice do you have for the youth in deciding what music is healthy and what's not?

"It's important to remember that good music brings about good emotions and feelings, but bad music awakens the lusts of the flesh and wears faith away. The music of Zion is always good and safe. It should be our first choice, but there are also other forms of music that don't awaken the lusts of the flesh and can bring about good and noble feelings. Examples include traditional patriotic music and classical music from composers such as Bach and Beethoven. If music is appealing to the lusts of the flesh or becomes too important, there is reason to reconsider its appropriateness."

2. Through the Internet, one can access and download all types of music, good and bad. In a sense, this greater availability of music is a relatively new added danger for today's youth, especially to those who may battle against the temptation of worldly music. Do you have any comments on this added danger?

"I agree that technology has brought the enemy's temptations closer to us, but the battle is yet the same. We want to keep faith and good conscience and reject those offerings of the enemy that cause us to veer from the pathway to heaven. I feel that one place of watching today is our Bebo sites. I have occasionally navigated through believers' Bebo sites and have wondered how some can feature music clips with a worldly melody or beat, or words that clearly are contrary to how we believe. I have concluded that it generally has been done thoughtlessly, but I have also thought that the enemy has sometimes succeeded in causing us to become sleepy in this matter."

3. Your presentation included a quote by Luther: "The gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming the Word of God through music." Songs of Zion are refreshing and uplifting to our faith. On the contrary, inappropriate music is used as a tool by the enemy of souls to tempt the believer. What are your thoughts on the different effects these two different types of music have on our lives with respect to Luther's quote?

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“Luther saw music as a tool to serve the Lord and to make known His Word. Songs of Zion do just that. They reinforce the teachings of God’s Word and allow us to uplift our hearts to praise God. Songs of Zion learned in youth guide and uplift us throughout our lives. The enemy also sees his chance to use this tool of music to cause God’s children to begin to love the world. It’s a place of watching for all of us.”

“IS THE MUSIC I LISTEN TO AIDING OR HINDERING?”

Excerpts from different genres of music were played in the sanctuary of the church during a recent youth discussion in Rockford. Some of these genres included the “grey areas” of music that we face today. After an excerpt had been played, feelings and reactions to the music were discussed. Some of the excerpts felt uncomfortable while others felt like good, wholesome music. The music that felt uncomfortable seemed to be that music which has been called “grey.” If this music feels uncomfortable in church, why should it feel comfortable elsewhere?

The music was presented in the form of music videos and this added to the discussion. The videos seemed to focus on the performance and its performers. If the performer was a woman, she was usually dressed in a way that was revealing. Do these kinds of videos help the believer on his or her journey to heaven?

What I personally took from that discussion were some important questions: What is the focus of my life? If the focus of my life is to get to heaven, then is the music I am listening to aiding or hindering me from getting there?

Loren Kesti

“WE WANT TO HELP OUR FRIENDS REACH HEAVEN”

Music is a very important and great gift from God. It strengthens us in our every-day life and through songs of Zion, we can pray, praise God, and be uplifted in faith. Although music is a great gift, it can also be a front-line battleground for many of us in our days of youth. At the January youth discussion in Rockford, this topic of music was discussed. We talked about the importance of choosing good, healthy music, understanding the nature of music and how it affects our feelings, and being our brother's keeper in this matter.

As believing youth, we can do a lot to influence our friends in a positive way with our music choices. God has given us believing friends to help us on our journey. When we're with them, we should openly discuss the music we listen to, even though it's hard to rebuke our friends if the music being played is inappropriate. If we can establish those grounds with our friends and discuss how certain music makes us feel and put away dangerous music, our relationships with our friends are actually strengthened. We want to be free to share our music choices with others and get input from different groups of friends, our parents and siblings, or anyone. Do we freely play our music in our players in our homes? Would we play that music in our cars if Jesus were a passenger? If we wouldn't have the strength to rebuke our friends, we pray that we can at least exchange bad music for good, and let this be a sermon. We can also play healthy music in our cars when those friends who battle with inappropriate music are riding. Most important, we want to speak to each other when we have concerns and take care of matters. We want to help our friends reach that mutual goal of heaven.

Brent Herrala

“WITH A THANKFUL HEART I PRAYED TO GOD”

I have been surrounded by music all of my life. As a young child, I learned many children’s songs at home and school. I always looked forward to the monthly song services at church. I couldn’t wait for a chance to call out my favorite song for the congregation to sing. It was exciting when the organist would pick my song from the numbers called out. At this young age I was naive to worldly music.

I started my first job during my mid-teen years. Often times, a coworker would turn the radio on, choosing his or her favorite music station. By this age, I was well aware that the music playing over the radio was not fit for a believer. At first, I thought that I would just tune it out and not listen to it. This worked for a short time. As the weeks and months went by and I went to work day after day, the songs started to become familiar to me. At times I found myself singing along silently in my mind. I no longer thought about tuning the music out and I started listening to it in my car.

I always looked forward to singing at church and haps, and often thought how the songs I sang and listened to in my car brought no joy, but it was the church songs that brought joy. I knew I had fallen into sin and needed to have my matters taken care of. Yet, the devil knew otherwise and tried to tempt me even more, telling me that worldly music wasn’t so bad.

Sometimes at services or a discussion, the topic of music would be spoken of. As I sat there in the bench, I would think to myself that yes, I would take care of this sin that very day. But the day soon ended, and the sin remained on my conscience. Days turned into weeks and I became burdened over this name-sin. I thought for sure the devil had taken hold of me regarding this matter.

I often prayed that I would be given strength to speak to a trusted friend to have this sin forgiven. One day I was given strength and was able to be freed from this burden. With a thankful heart I prayed to God that my weak faith would be protected. I have found that keeping CDs of songs of Zion in my car helps me to fight this battle. As the church songs and hymns play as I drive down the road, it chases away the desire to turn on the radio in search of worldly music. I want to encourage you who may struggle with this same temptation to put this sin away, so you can remain believing and one day reach eternal life in heaven.

A young believer

SHARING GOOD MUSIC—A WAY TO STRENGTHEN THE BOND BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD

The sun has set, and the late summer sky is slowly darkening as carloads of young people arrive at our home. They have come from congregations near and far, gathering to carpool for the trip to Peace Gardens Youth Days. Out come the songbooks—English and Finnish— and we parents can join in or just sit and enjoy listening to the rich swell of voices singing songs of Zion. There is a warm and united feeling in the room when so many are singing these beautiful songs and at least for a moment, temporal cares are set aside.

In our home, as in many others, we have many empty CD cases. We often lament about our missing CDs, but at the same time we are thankful when our young are listening to healthy and appropriate music. When our children have come home from various camps, we have noticed an awakening or renewal of interest in singing and playing music, and the good experiences of the camp seem to linger on with the music.

I have enjoyed playing piano or piano and flute duets with our children. Sharing music is one way of strengthening the bond between parent and child and that can last a lifetime. With so many different types of music around us every day starting at a very young age, we have felt it important to encourage the presence of good music. There are many CDs available through our churches, and other good classical music available in the stores as well. We can attend our children's music concerts at school and support their music studies at home. It's important to know what type of music our children are listening to and have open discussions about good and bad choices. Although we can't keep our children in faith, as parents we certainly desire to help in any way possible. Music is a large part of our lives and encouraging an interest in health music may help to overcome the temptation of inappropriate music choices.

Helen Hillukka

“WE PRAY THAT GOD WILL GIVE US STRENGTH”

Keith Waaraniemi gave an interesting presentation that led to a good discussion about different kinds of music. The presentation wasn't meant to say what music is right and what music is wrong. Different excerpts of music were played, and the audience was then asked how that music made them feel. There were videos that went along with the music. Much discussion came out on each piece. Guidance came from many believers to be watchful with our music choices. Even some of the patriotic songs that it seems should be okay can appeal to our flesh.

There are many kinds of good music as well as bad music. Good music includes, but is not limited to, church music. It was brought up in the discussion how songs of Zion can help calm a person during stressful times and bring comfort during times of trial.

Music that appeals to our flesh is around every day, whether it be in a store, at work, school, or elsewhere in public. Often times a person can't shut it off or just walk away. We need to pray that God will give us strength to fight temptations when they come. We pray that God will continue to bless His kingdom and give us strength to help each other along the way to heaven.

Emily Jurmu
Andrea Lahti

MUSIC INFLUENCES, MUSIC CHOICES

Music is obviously important to young people in this country, where recorded music is readily available to stream continuously into their ears through various devices. More than any other age group, American youth listen to music and watch music videos an average of four to five hours a day. According to the authors of the book, *It's Not Only Rock & Roll**, it "alters and intensifies their moods, furnishes much of their slang, dominates their conversations and provides the ambiance at their social gatherings. Music styles define the crowds and cliques they run in. Music personalities provide models for how they act and dress."

Do you find music to be an important part of your life? Does it fill your ears less or more than this average? If music shapes your attitudes this powerfully, what should you choose to listen to? Which music categories are appropriate and "safe" for your ears, body, and soul?

Endless Choices

If you were to wander down the aisles of available recorded music, either in a store or online, you might note that your listening choices are simply endless. If you subscribe to a music service like I do, you will find the following categories: Rock & Pop, Rhythm & Blues/Hip-Hop, Country, Jazz, Classical, Latin, Christian, and more including: Soundtracks, New Age, Reggae, World Music, Blues, Folk, Easy Listening, and Gospel. In each of these categories you will find five to ten sub-categories. For instance, if you click the "Christian" label you will find: Christian Pop, Christian Dance, Contemporary Gospel, Christian Children's, Christian Rock, Christian Country, Traditional Gospel, Christian R&B and Hip-Hop, Praise & Worship, and Southern Gospel.

Since a review of all these music genres would take an encyclopedia to complete, I will speak for a moment about rock music of the 50s and 60s and its profound impact on the rhythmic composition of almost all of these music categories to this day.

Fleshly Impact of Rock, R&B, etc.

The following quotations come from a biographical book about the Beatles rock band titled, *Can't Buy Me Love*, in which the author Jonathon Gould explains this historical impact: "Rock-'n'-roll tapped into a vein of African-American rhythm that lay behind the sup-ple syncopations of swing, beyond the cultural reach of New York City, and beyond the experience of most white Americans. By weighing upbeats and off beats like downbeats, the jump, stomp, and boogie rhythms that rock derived from R&B turned the metric organization of European music on its head."

He continues: "Rock rhythm reached up through the feet and the legs into the groin and gut... and it engendered a form of physical movement that had previously been taboo in nearly all precincts of white society." Even without any lyrics, rock-'n'-roll music "seemed to exist entirely in the present moment—an affective quality that it shared with adolescents themselves. (p. 103)"

Ross Fredrickson, Brett Hillukka, and Marcus Pylvainen (L-R) sing songs of Zion at a going-away occasion of a friend who is leaving for