

The Therapeutic Aspects of Music

Music within Us

Throughout life, before birth till we draw our last breath, music resounds within us, voicing emotions we may find difficult to express in other ways. Take a moment to reflect on life, death; faith, peace, war, holidays, health, sickness, patriotism, nature, love, courage, good, evil, aspirations, and fears. Your thoughts may drift toward certain descriptive words or to the lines of a poem, yet words are often interwoven with strains of music. A melody may immediately transport us back to the graveside of a loved one; another may make us remember Christmas or Easter; another makes us consider the freedom enjoyed in our countries; and yet another reminds of trials or blessings experienced in life. In this way music, especially songs of Zion, can comfort us in sorrow, help express our joys, relieve tension and stress, and direct focus on aspects of our lives that are often passed over in daily living.

Music as Therapy

Music can be therapeutic in many ways—playing, singing, listening, and creating. Therapeutic aspects have always been present in music and have been recognized and utilized for centuries. Music therapy can be prescribed in order to restore, maintain, and improve psychological, physical, and physiological wellbeing. We can recall from Scripture that music was prescribed for King Saul when he was troubled by an evil spirit. The psalmist, David, was called on to provide this therapy by playing his music on the strings of a harp; as he played "Saul was refreshed and was well; and the evil spirit departed from him" (1 Sam. 16:23). Therapeutic aspects of music have continued to be explored and developed.

In our society music is often prescribed for therapeutic purposes. Those who utilize music to achieve specific therapeutic goals and objectives are known as music therapists. Music therapists working in hospitals, nursing facilities, schools, treatment centers, hospices, group homes, as well as in private practice may use music to achieve care objectives:

- To increase communication skills and interaction with others
- To increase the ability to use energy - purposefully
- To stimulate creativity and imagination
- To improve fine and gross motor skills
- To improve auditory perception

Music therapists work with a wide variety of people: the mentally ill; the physically handicapped; the elderly, including those with Alzheimer's disease and dementia; the terminally ill; the developmentally delayed; the traumatically brain injured; and the learning disabled. For many people experiencing difficult life situations, music therapists are able to utilize music as a powerful tool to help them.

Clinical music therapists are not the only ones, however, who can provide music therapy. Among God's children, music has always been a therapeutic fount. All of us are able to share music with our families, friends, and neighbors in times of sorrow and in times of joy. You may recall songs of Zion at a loved one's passing, or at a wedding or baptism. The message present in the songs, together with the lovely melodies, capture the thoughts of our hearts and minds and, help us express those thoughts in way that is truly meaningful and beautiful. In addition to the textual message and the nonverbal melodic message of the songs, singing itself is therapeutic. We are automatically required to breathe more deeply and actively engage various muscles that are necessary for singing, thereby increasing our overall sense of wellbeing. In addition, singing together with others creates a sense of unity and shared purpose that is uplifting and encouraging.

This therapeutic side of music can also be self-prescribed; we can play, sing, create, or listen to music that helps us in our walk of life. My departed grandfather often requested that we sing or play his favorite songs of Zion. Though his singing voice had long-since failed and he could not physically join in the singing, he listened eagerly. Captured in the woven messages of texts and melodies were his memories of childhood, memories of a long marriage and departed spouse, reflections on warfare--both temporal and spiritual, and struggles with bodily illness. Hearing these songs brought tears to his eyes But also gave him renewed strength and energy to take a few more steps on his walk of life.

A Final Note

With all the stresses we face in daily life, we can often find therapeutic value in the varied voices of music. It can also be therapeutic to appreciate what effect music may have on those around us. Take time to notice how others around you are effected by music in their life at services, in the car, at home, and in other places. In this way, we are able to more fully appreciate this gift of music and the therapeutic aspects that music can bring into our lives. Of course, the ultimate therapy for the child of God is gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name and blood. Truly, singing of and praising for this gospel-gift is the greatest music therapy.

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