

The Overwhelming Influence of Music

Because I appear to be outgoing, it may come as a shock that I ever had to deal with a degree of bashfulness. Even as I write these words, some of you do not believe me. Even my antics, when I came across as being a class clown, were part of an emotional defense mechanism. (It is kind of scary thinking of your pastor with emotional hang-ups, isn't it?) I had to say good-bye to all my friends when we moved to Florida between the third and fourth grades. It was a whole new world from the Washington D.C. area. Being born in the south with southern parents, I was encouraged to say, "yes sir" and "Yes ma'am." However, I was rebuked as a smart-aleck when in the first grades of school I would address the teachers in Washington with "yes, ma'am." In the fourth grade in Florida with my new teachers, I would not dare attempt my home-style manners. So, when answering to them I said a quick, crisp, "yes." A frown would be given and I would be asked, "What did you say to me, boy?" I was lectured and reminded that in this class I would respond respectfully by saying, "Yes, ma'am or yes, sir." It was confusing, but with some of the kids kidding me already about the funny way I pronounced words, I was about to crash and burn emotionally.

Two things happened in elementary school that lifted me up. I was the fastest kid in school. What a boost came when we raced against the other classes and I was chosen to represent our class in the dash! Then something else happened in the sixth grade. I was friends with a guy named David Carns and after school one day I walked home with David. On the way home, David and I were goofing off and I began to sing the latest Beach Boy song that I had heard. I was amazed first of all that talkative David got quiet, then even more amazed when he looked at me and laughed out loud, then said, "Man, Pope, do that again." Now I am glowing as I not only do it again, but then give him my complete repertoire of songs. Later the next week we were over at Carns' when a whole group of six graders from both classes came over. Rickey McDonald, John Hall (with whom I had just been involved in a fight), Walter Kent and a few other guys. We were gathered in David's room when he looked at me and said "Hey, Pope, sing 'em the Beach Boys." I soon recovered from the first embarrassed shock to sing 'em a few bars, then McDonald, Hall and Carns began to back me up. I couldn't believe it; I had died and resurrected as Brian Wilson!

My new found acceptance followed me into high school as I imitated the voices of Paul McCartney and Barry Gibbs. For those reading this that don't know it, I was reared as a preacher's son, so much of my listening pleasure was "boot-legged." I had gone to several jam sessions with my dad's old guitar at a neighborhood friend's garage. An invitation was given to join in a group. You should have heard me saying, "Look, Dad, we'll be playing this music and others might be dancing, but not me." Well, you can imagine correctly; I didn't make the sell. I was told by my dad, "If you are going to be singing, you can just sing in church!" So I did. I purchased my first guitar, a Fender twelve string and soon I was scheduled to sing my first special. The song was entitled, "The Wonder of It All." I can close my eyes and see the congregation's response—some of the older folks were wiping tears (yes, it was that bad) and my peers were not pre-occupied as youth often are in church; they were truly listening. The second song I sung in church was a duet with another teen. Man! We were becoming regular "Jesus freaks." The song spoke to me even stronger. My first few songs were hand-picked by Dad; do you think he was trying to get my attention or something? Anyway, the second song was entitled, "He's Everything to Me." As my mind goes back, even though it has been years since we sang that song, I still remember the words, "In the stars His handiwork I see..." closing with "...what is that to me? Till one day I met Him face to face and felt the wonders of His grace. Now I know He's more than just a God who doesn't care, that lives away up there. Now He walks beside me everyday...." I could see, it got to people, but more than anyone else, it got to me. Within a short time I had done what the song said and Christ had become everything to me.

I witnessed first-hand the power of music. Music had given me a very small measure of popularity and had my parents been willing to compromise, it would have allowed me even more

attention, but for all the wrong reasons and with the wrong crowd. In my first year of college, I was in a group, but we sang for the glory of God and the music worked hand-in-hand with the preaching to help initiate a true revival spirit. I'm getting melancholy as I write these words because the sounds in my head are reminding me that in every great move of God we experienced, God used music to help break up the fallow ground (Hosea 10:12). I remember one revival I was involved in was called, "Pass It On." The words of the flagship song were, "It only takes a spark to get the fire burning, pass it on, pass it on." Another revival was themed "Up With Jesus," which was a spiritual answer to the "Up With People" youth movement.

When I was in my last years of college in northwest Indiana, I was the preacher and song director for Junior Church. My fiancée, to whom I am now married, was our pianist. It was so exciting to hear five thousand junior age kids from the roughest areas of Chicagoland singing, "God Is So Wonderful" and "If You're Saved and You Know It, Say Amen!" The kids could have been rowdy, but just start singing and the atmosphere changed. I am amazed at the overwhelming power of music.

Recently, my wife and I were at a musical in The Hobby Center. During the break people were walking around and without embarrassment, humming and singing songs they had just heard. And they were doing so very happily. Have you pulled up to a red light and experienced being blown away by some youth's mega sound system? Sadly, much of what our youth are listening to is not edifying, enriching or spiritual. But when they turn up their music they are saying this is where I am at, this is what I want to say, I don't really care what you think about it, and furthermore if you are within fifty feet of my world you are going to have to listen. Even with their youth, they understand the power of music.

My question to the church at this hour is, do we realize the overwhelming power of music? Music in the church and our individual life should not be take so nonchalantly. We need to remember all music takes us somewhere. If you don't believe that, just ask someone who has ever fallen in love, if there was a song, that meant a lot to them during their courtship. If I hear the song, "Here's My Life," I immediately return in my mind and heart to our wedding day, when Mrs. Beverly Hyles sang that song at our wedding. Everyone has music in their life. You cannot buy a car without a radio and usually a CD or tape player. Where is your music taking you?

Could you sing or play an instrument in church? Since all music takes us somewhere, wouldn't it be a blessing knowing that you have made music that brings to a person's mind to the fact that they should accept Christ or be dedicated to Him? If you would be willing to do so, would you be willing to make music with excellence? If you play an offertory or sing a special, experience the personal renewal you go through as you are learning your music. Let us not take the attitude, "If I will not be inconvenienced, I'll play or sing in the choir." If choir music moves from being good to great, it is because we were willing to be inconvenienced. Next time you hear a symphony perform with excellence, you are listening to music that was practiced for hours on end. In Salt Lake City, Utah some members of The Tabernacle choir will travel one hundred and thirty miles one direction on a week-day night to spend a couple hours in practice. Be reminded that we are Bible-believing people with the true and living message; should we not at least show the same dedication to travel ten or fifteen minutes to practice for one and a half hours on Sunday, just before the evening service? It was said of the ancient Levites, "...*all that could skill of instruments of musick*" (II Chronicles 34:12).

If you open your Bibles you will notice that God has included a Psalm Book. That will help us remember why this book was put here, it is the song book for Israel. In this beautiful book, God speaks of "a new song" (Psalm 40:3; 96:1;149:1;144:9). Our Lord also speaks of a way of being encouraged with "songs in the night" (Psalm 42:8;77:6). Psalm 45 is entitled, "A Song of Loves" and Psalm 92 is entitled "Song for the Sabbath Day." Even The Song of Solomon begins with these words, "*The song of songs, which is Solomon's.*" God intends us to bring glory to Him through music! So I say, let the music begin and be revived in Christchurch! "...*whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*" (I Corinthians

10:30).

- Pastor Pope -

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