

Chapter Three  
God, My Heart, and Music  
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IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY AMERICA, we love our music. Satellite radio, CDs, streaming Internet, and iPods enable us to live our lives to a constant soundtrack. Walk through any public venue and you'll see dozens of people oblivious to their surroundings, tuned in to whatever's pouring through their ear buds. For many of us, life without music would be unthinkable, undesirable, and unbearable.

But we don't always have the choice to forgo music. There are times I've felt like I couldn't escape it even if I wanted to. We're subjected to music in grocery stores, elevators, doctor's offices, shopping malls, coffee shops, theme parks, restaurants, and every public setting imaginable. It's not just the hills that are alive with the sound of music. It's our entire culture.

Do you ever think about the effect all this music might be having on us? On you? Is it all just innocent entertainment? Can we listen to too much music? Could there be consequences we're completely unaware of?

As a professional musician for the past thirty years, and someone who has over forty days of music on my iTunes, I've asked myself these questions more than once. It only makes sense to find out if so much music is a good thing or a bad thing. And if you're a Christian who listens to or makes music in today's culture, you should be asking yourself these questions as well.

To find some answers, we need to look beyond the current music climate. We need to start at the beginning.

### **God's Idea**

Music is God's idea, and apparently he enjoys it immensely. He told King David, "a man after his own heart," to schedule musicians who would play and sing regularly before his presence at the tabernacle (1 Sam. 13:14; 1 Chron. 16:5-7). The psalms regularly exhort us to sing a new song to the Lord and to praise him to the sound of musical instruments (Ps. 33:1; 150). Jesus sang with his disciples (Matt. 26:30), and we're told

to speak to one another “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19). And music isn’t just for this life. The book of Revelation tells us that music will continue into eternity, where we’ll forever sing the praises of the Lamb who was slain.

But God’s intentions for music include more than public worship settings. In the Bible, music also accompanies war, work, funerals, love, and play (Ex. 32:17–18; Isa. 16:10; Matt. 11:17; Judg. 11:34; Isa. 5:1; Matt. 11:17). God created us to enjoy both making and listening to music. Musical activities have been an everyday part of life for thousands of years, enabling us to express more deeply our joys, our sorrows, and a hundred other aspects of the human condition.

With the variety of music styles in the world, I’ve sometimes wondered if God has a favorite kind of music. Does he like folk more than jazz? Classical more than hard rock? Does he prefer the lilting sound of flutes to the blaring of bagpipes? Occasionally I have this fear that we’ll get to heaven and find out that God’s favorite music is opera.

Actually, it seems that God likes music of all kinds. No one style can sufficiently capture his glory or even begin to reflect the vastness of his wisdom, creativity, beauty, and order. That doesn’t mean some kinds of music aren’t more complex or beautiful than others. It just means no single genre of music is better than the rest in every way. As Harold Best puts it:

God is not Western; God is not Eastern; God is not exclusively the God of classical culture or of primitive culture; God is the Lord of the plethora, the God of the diverse, the redeemer of the plural. . . . Pentecost tells us that one artistic tongue is only a start and a thousand will never suffice. There is no single chosen language or artistic or musical style that, better than all others, can capture and repeat back the fullness of the glory of God.

So what does music have to do with worldliness, the focus of this book?

To answer that question, we have to ask a few more. What motivates us to like the music we do? Is music entirely neutral? Why does music affect us so deeply? Does the music I listen to affect my thoughts or behavior in any way? Does it say anything about my relationship with God? Most important, are my music choices consistent with the gospel that has saved me?

If these questions don't seem important, think again. Music can be more dangerous than most of us realize. It has the potential to harden our hearts and weaken our faith. In fact, a wise Christian understands that listening to music without discernment and godly intent reveals a heart willing to flirt with the world.

Without discernment we won't be alert to the effects music might be having on us. Without godly intent we'll be listening to it for the wrong reasons. We'll be failing to fulfill the purpose for which Christ redeemed us. Paul tells us, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19–20). We were ransomed from hell so we could glorify God.

Music is one more way God intends for us to do that.

### **It's Just Music—or Is It?**

Music can be simply defined as an organized combination of melody, harmony, and rhythm. For non-musicians, melody is the part you can whistle, harmony describes the music that supports the melody, and rhythm is the beat.

Those three elements in themselves carry no moral value. There are no "evil" melodies or "false" rhythms. Music alone is incapable of lying to us or commanding us to do wrong. Music by itself is also unable to communicate "truth statements" to us. A melody can't unpack the meaning of Christ's substitutionary atonement, a chord progression can't clearly articulate that God created the world, and no beat can express the meaning of the incarnation.

But music affects our emotions in profound ways. Some say it's related to the effect music has on our body chemistry. One journalist noted that "physiological links between melody and the mind are far greater than we ever imagined," and that "listening to and playing music actually can alter how our brains and . . . our bodies function." His comments concluded with a quote from opera star Denyce Graves: "Whether or not people choose to recognize the power of music, it remains a spiritual experience, a healing experience. It can save us."

No, music can't save us. But it can deeply affect us.

The passions music draws out range from noble to base, from simple to complex, from God-glorifying to sensual. That's why people who write advertising jingles, pop songs, and film scores can make a decent living.

They know music speaks powerfully to our emotions. Most of us are touched by the music we hear, even when we're unaware of it. In fact, sometimes we realize how music is affecting us only when we notice it's not playing anymore.

So why does music affect us? Often our responses are based on learned musical principles. To most Americans, fast music in a major key sounds happy, while slow music in a minor key signifies sadness. When those signals are mixed, we tend to get disoriented. If someone plays "Here Comes the Bride" in a minor key or The 1812 Overture at half the normal speed, even non-musicians will inherently know something's wrong. They may not be able to describe it in musical terms, but they'll know the song isn't communicating what it's supposed to. Musical principles are being violated.

Attentiveness can also determine the way music influences us. If I'm engaged in deep conversation with my wife at Starbucks, I'm not always aware of the music being pumped through the speakers. It's a different story when I'm at home reviewing a newly purchased CD or listening to it repeatedly on my iPod. Music tends to move us more if our minds are focused on it.

There are other reasons music affects us, such as volume, familiarity, and our background. But probably no aspect of music affects us more than the things we associate with it.

A few years ago, members of my family endured repeated cases of strep throat. As one person recovered, someone else fell ill. We finally found out why. My oldest son was a "carrier," never getting sick himself but continually passing on the bacteria to others.

Music is like my son—a carrier. Because music can't be handled, smelled, or seen, it tends to get its meaning from the things that surround it. Sometimes those associations are positive, like a song from your wedding or carols on Christmas Eve. But sometimes we associate music with negative, even sinful, things. And if we don't realize what music is "carrying," worldly attitudes and desires can influence and affect our unsuspecting hearts.

I've found music can be a carrier of at least three elements: content, context, and culture.

## Music Conveys Content

The most obvious connection we make with music is content, meaning the lyrics. In the previous chapter, Craig Cabaniss pointed out how Philippians 4:8 should guide our media choices. That same verse provides God's standards for content in the songs we listen to. It tells us what music should lead us to think about.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Phil. 4:8)

These biblical standards instantly bring into question much of the music that's currently popular and available to us. When I don't even consider ungodly lyrical content in the songs I listen to, I'm allowing music to seduce me.

It's not uncommon for Christians on Sunday mornings to worship Jesus for his substitutionary death on the cross, then sing songs during the week that exalt the sins he died for. We sing, "My chains are gone, I've been set free," then remain enslaved to lyrics that promote fornication, profanity, anger, godless pleasure, sensuality, and materialism. "From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so" (James 3:10). James is right. These things ought not to be so. But when someone expresses a concern about song lyrics, we usually have a ready reply: "I don't even listen to the words. I don't know what they're saying."

My response is, "Why not?" Christians, of all people, should be asking what songs actually mean. We're to "do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). And if we "never" listen to the words attached to music, we're training ourselves to tune out the content of songs and simply allow the music to affect us. That makes it all the more difficult to focus on the truths we sing on Sundays. We'll tend to be more influenced by the sound, beat, and tempo than the word of Christ we're proclaiming.

Don't misunderstand me. Listening to a song with sexually suggestive lyrics won't cause you to run to the Internet and start downloading pornography. Hearing a song with profanity doesn't mean you'll be peppering your conversations tomorrow with four-letter words. But over time the lyrics to songs can weaken our defenses, blur our discernment,

and redirect our affections toward the world. Listening to music is never neutral, because our sinful hearts are involved.

Drift won't happen right away. And you probably won't even notice it. One of my unmarried daughters confessed to me how listening to "harmless" romantic songs for a season had contributed toward her general lack of spiritual passion. Another young woman's descent into immorality began with repeated exposure to music that glamorized rebellion and idolized love based on sexual attraction. I've known guys who work out to songs with angry, profane lyrics because they say the music motivates them to push themselves harder. One day they find themselves singing along to words they used to tune out, words they would be embarrassed to repeat in the presence of their parents or a pastor.

Music with ungodly lyrics can persuade us to love things we wouldn't ordinarily love—specifically the “desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions” (1 John 2:16). I've seen it happen in my children, in my friends, and in my own life. It can happen in you. We're foolish to repeatedly subject ourselves to songs whose lyrics could dull our conscience and make us glory in sinful desires rather than the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14).

Sometimes we pride ourselves in what we can handle, as if exposing ourselves to temptation were a virtue. That attitude reminds me of a story I once read about a group of coach drivers applying for a job. One of them would be chosen to carry the king's children up and down a narrow, winding road leading up to the king's mountain-top castle. With dozens of steep drop-offs and no guardrails, it was a daunting assignment.

The king's chief liveryman asked each candidate this question: “How close can you get to the edge without going over?”

The applicants offered various responses indicating their confidence and skill. One man boasted he could drive the horses at nearly full speed for the entire length of the road, always keeping within six inches from the edge.

The interviewer was unimpressed. Finally, one driver stepped forward and responded, “Sir, if it's the king's children, I want to stay as far from the edge as I possibly can.”

He was hired.

If we're concerned about the seductive effect worldly lyrics can have on our souls, we won't be racing close to the edge of sin, seeing how

much we can take in before it finally starts affecting us. We won't be tempting ourselves with music that contains profanity, sensuality, rebellion, or other worldly attitudes. We'll want to stay as far from the edge as we can.

### **Music Conveys Context**

A second element music carries is context. Context refers to the environments we connect with music—the places, events, and people that surround the music we listen to on a regular basis.

There are two aspects to this. One is the past contexts that listening to music evokes. A traditional hymn might signify profound devotion to someone who grew up in a God-honoring church but lifeless formalism to a person whose upbringing was nominally Christian. Our feelings about a particular song or musical style can be significantly influenced by the contexts we've heard it in.

Harold Best relates the true story of a young man who became involved in a satanic cult that used a certain type of music in its rituals. Eventually the young man became a Christian. A few months after his conversion, he was sitting in a church service when fear suddenly gripped his heart. The organist was playing music that reminded him of the satanic cult he'd left. In confusion, he fled the building. The music he heard happened to be written by Johann Sebastian Bach, a devout Christian acknowledged by many as one of the greatest composers in history. But the young man found it difficult to separate the music he heard from its original evil context.

Another way to think about context is the environments in which we listen to music currently. Your contexts for enjoying music probably aren't directly tied to the worship of demons, but they might be no less dangerous. If you attend concerts or events where the artists or the crowd intentionally promote sensuality, godlessness, or rebellion, you're flirting with the world. And you might not even be aware of it.

I've known young people, raised by Christian parents, who at some point became attracted to a particular music group or style. To fulfill their musical appetite, they started to frequent clubs, bars, and concerts. They sought out ungodly friends who shared the same musical preferences, oblivious to the potential effect on their souls. They started watching music videos that exploited sexuality. When their parents challenged them,

they responded, “I just like the music.” But over time their wardrobe, mannerisms, and attitudes changed to reflect their new influences. Some of them walked away from the faith. Music had become the carrier of the worldly contexts that surrounded it.

Radio is another context in which we can listen to music. Some Christians regularly tune in to secular radio shows. There’s nothing inherently wrong with that. We read books written by non-Christians, watch movies produced by non-Christians, and certainly can enjoy certain songs written by non-Christians. However, along with the questionable content of many songs, DJ’s often make comments that reflect the world’s attitudes toward sex, relationships, use of language, and life in general.

My non-Christian neighbor once told me he wouldn’t listen to his normal radio station when his six-year-old son was in the car because the announcer’s chatter between songs was so offensive. He didn’t see the glaring contradiction in his life. Unfortunately, many Christians aren’t any more discerning.

*Where I hear my music makes a difference.*

### **Music Conveys Culture**

A third element music can reflect is culture.

Culture describes the values we connect with music. It’s how we respond to, shape, organize, and rule our surroundings. Culture changes from generation to generation, from nation to nation, and from family to family. That’s why we can enjoy some songs now that might have been labeled “evil” back in the ’50s or ’60s because of the beat, the musicians’ long hair, or the psychedelic colors on the album covers. Many of those songs are now connected to a movie, a commercial, or a product rather than a rebellious generation. What they “mean” has changed along with their cultural associations.

Culture isn’t the same as worldliness. Our society’s cultural makeup has both positive and negative characteristics. We can seek to relate to our culture without being worldly. But worldliness—self-exalting opposition to God—is present in every culture and can be found in anything associated with the music we listen to: packaging, advertisements, pictures, and web sites, as well as a musical artist’s clothing, attitudes, and interviews.



Many of the songs at the top of the charts are filled with ungodly aspects of our culture, stemming from the lives of those who make and market the music. See if you can recognize any of them in your favorite music:

- independence and rebellion (“I am my own authority”);
- emotionalism (“To feel is to know”);
- temporal narcissism (“Five years ago is ancient history”);
- love of pleasure (“It’s all about me”);
- sexual immorality (“Marriage and purity are so yesterday”);
- transience (“Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die”).

You might not intentionally and enthusiastically embrace any of these values. But all of them can find their way into our hearts through the music we enjoy.

It’s important to note that music and its associations don’t create sin in our hearts—they simply reveal what’s already there. If I chafe at my parents’ authority, I’m going to be drawn to friends and contexts that allow me to express my independence. If I’m intent on feeding my appetite for sensual pleasures, I can easily justify watching music videos, even though I’ll be regularly confronted with sexually provocative images. If I’m given to self-pity (“Why doesn’t anyone recognize how good/important/special I am?”), I’ll be drawn to music that’s melancholic, depressing, and hopeless. If I value what I feel over what I know to be true, I’ll tend to listen to music that feels good rather than music that’s good for me.

God tells us in Galatians 1:4 that Jesus “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.” Jesus died on the cross to deliver us from the penalty of our sins and from the world’s attitudes and desires. We’ve been set free from its destructive and deceptive grip. The “present evil age” doesn’t refer to a specific type of music, a certain artist, or a particular decade. It’s much broader than that. It’s an underlying anti-God approach to all of life. And it can be found in the music we listen to.

At this point, maybe you’d like me to suggest a list of artists or music styles that every Christian should either pursue or avoid. Sorry, but that list doesn’t exist. And if it did, I’m not convinced it would be helpful. What’s appropriate for one person to listen to might be sin for someone else because of the differing associations we make. We rarely hear music in a

vacuum. Depending on the state of our hearts, any song we hear is a potential carrier of worldly values and perspectives.

Rather than a list, I offer you two questions.

First, does the music you listen to lead you to love the Savior more or cause your affections for Christ to diminish?

Second, does your music lead you to value an eternal perspective or influence you to adopt the mindset of this “present evil age”?

Answering these questions honestly is an important step toward making wise decisions about the music you listen to and living a life worthy of the gospel.

### **The Effect of Ignorance: Compromise**

If we don’t take the time to soberly evaluate our music listening habits, we can become oblivious to the worldly propaganda music carries. We can be led into compromise. Here are some of the signs that you’re already there.

You *seldom or never use Scripture to evaluate your decisions about music*. Hopefully, you’ve seen by now that while Scripture may not address specific styles of music, it does address the hearts that are listening. We may assume God gave us music just to make us happy, not holy; he actually gave us music to make us happy *and* holy.

Music is far too significant a part of our lives for us to assume it won’t affect us. Proverbs 14:15 reminds us, “The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps.” Discernment in music is simply one part of the overall discernment we’re called to exercise as disciples of Jesus Christ. Unexamined listening habits leave us at the mercy of our own sinful desires and the influence of a godless culture.

Another area Scripture addresses is how our music listening affects those around us. Jesus strongly warned those who caused little ones to sin (Luke 17:1–2). Does your music provide a temptation for new Christians, younger siblings, children, and non-discerning peers? How are you demonstrating love to others through the music you’re exposing them to?

*Your music listening is characterized by objectionable content or ungodly contexts*. “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Prov. 13:20). The music we listen to regularly becomes a “companion” that informs our view of the world, influences our emotional state, and affects our thinking. If we wouldn’t

trust a non-Christian to give us counsel on how to live our lives, why would we regularly listen to their counsel set to music?

Christians often justify their questionable music choices by saying that music produced by non-Christians is more creative than Christian music. They praise artists like the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Dave Matthews Band, Jay-Z, and others for their musical innovation and originality. There's no doubt they're creative. What we can forget is that non-Christian companies and bands are also more creative in deceiving us to love the world. They aren't trying to care for our souls; they want us to buy their product. They want us to forget there's a God to whom we're accountable for our every word, thought, and action. If you consistently choose ungodly music as your companion, you won't be the exception. You too will suffer harm.

There are numerous ways we can look for creative music that won't require subjecting ourselves to the world's mindset and values. I've scanned radio stations, used web sites like Pandora.com, listened to 30-second clips on iTunes, or followed up on recommendations from friends. But in the end, seeking out and listening to "creative" music isn't a right we can demand at the expense of biblical standards. It could be a sign that we're worshipping at the altar of innovation rather than at the foot of the cross.

*Your priorities and schedule revolve around music.* A friend confessed to me once that he turned on the radio every time he entered his bedroom, regardless of how long he planned to be there. He began to realize that being able to listen to music "whenever he wanted" was becoming a form of bondage, not freedom. Another friend told me he had difficulty living without the MP3 file-sharing service he had access to in college. He was bothered by the fact that he could no longer keep up with and buy the newest music. As he considered a music subscription service, he started to question how much time he'd have to commit to exploring unlimited downloads. He wisely decided against it.

The fact that new music exists doesn't mean I have to own it. Often, our obsession with music leaves less time for activities with more eternal value—Bible study, prayer, personal reflection, and serving others.

How much time do you spend looking for music to download? Browsing through CDs at Borders? Talking to friends about music, or singing lyrics in your head? Burning CDs? Watching music videos? Scanning iTunes? What does the time you invest say about the hold music

might have on you? If you're easily irritated when you aren't hearing the music you prefer, or if you're more passionate about a concert than participation in your church, music is more than a hobby. It's an idol.

*Your passion for Christ has waned; your passion for music hasn't.* There can be many explanations for our diminished zeal for God. Sometimes the most obvious reason is that we're feasting regularly at the world's table of delights. I've watched Christians dramatically encounter God and then gradually revert to sinful patterns because they failed to change their music listening habits. Sadly and predictably, they were seduced by the world's empty promises communicated through the music they listened to.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul grieves over those who “glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (Phil. 3:19). He describes them as “enemies of the cross of Christ” (3:18). When the music we regularly listen to glories in what should shame us and directs our minds to earthly things, we're being more than unwise. We're exposing ourselves to a message associated with the enemies of the cross—the cross that purchased our forgiveness and freed us from the bondage of our sinful desires.

### **Using Music for God's Glory**

We've spent most of this chapter focusing on the ways music can be a carrier of worldly attitudes and perspectives. But that's not the end of the story. Music is meant to be a means of bringing glory to God, one more way in which we can “proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). I want to suggest specific steps to help us use music in a way that benefits our souls and honors the Savior.

*Evaluate your current intake of music.* If you've read this far and thought, “I don't need to evaluate the quality or quantity of my music,” you're probably wrong. Because indwelling sin is so deceptive, I usually have a difficult time seeing the effect music is having on me. Areas to consider include how much music you listen to, what types, in what situations and times of day, and for how long. Ask your friends, parents, or a pastor to get their perspective on whether your music listening is characterized by biblical discernment and a desire to please God. Make

sure they give you an honest answer. It could be the means God uses to deliver you from the world's grasp.

*Delete or throw away music you'll listen to only if you backslide.* When we become Christians, God transforms our hearts. We're no longer those who live "in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind" (Eph. 2:3). Pursuits we once found appealing no longer interest us and at times even repulse us. But more often than not, music that might tempt us stays on our computers, in our CD collection, or on our MP3 player. Whether the reason is negligence, lack of time, or the thought that we might find it appealing at a later date, it's wise to get rid of what could hinder our growth in Christ.

*Listen to music with others.* As my children were growing up, we had one CD player in the house that served as the family listening center. Music was a family activity and no one developed his or her own private listening habits. Those days are long gone. But listening to music with others is still a good idea. Part of the joy music communicates comes from sharing it. If you only listen to music through a set of headphones, consider investing in a set of speakers for your iPod or an audio system for your home. And don't insist on listening to music only *you* like.

*Make music rather than listen to it.* You don't have to be especially gifted to play a guitar or plunk out chords on a piano. But even if you don't play an instrument, you can obey God's command to sing (Ps. 47:6). Producing music ourselves frees us from thinking that the joy music provides depends on technology.

*Go on a music fast.* At American University, students in a class called "Understanding Mass Media" were shocked to learn mid-semester that the course requirements included a 24-hour media fast: "No television, computers, iPods or other MP3 devices, radio, video games, CD players, records, or cell phones (or land lines) for 24 hours." One student described it as "grueling pain"; another called it "one of the toughest days I have had to endure." But everyone lived to tell about it, and some even thought they benefited from the assignment.

Maybe you can't imagine giving up your music for a month, a week, or even a day. But there are few more effective ways to measure the place music holds in your life, thinking, and behavior. It doesn't even have to be a full fast. You can try driving in silence for twenty minutes rather than

listening to the radio or your iPod. You can establish a limit to how much music you listen to each day.

Whatever kind of fast you choose, it's sure to leave you with more time to pray, read your Bible, and serve others.

*Keep track of how much music you buy.* Rhapsody, iTunes, and other downloading services have made it easier to lose track of how much you're actually spending on music. Before you know it, you've racked up one hundred dollars in charges for music you "had" to have. Realistically, some of us can't even listen to all the music we buy. Figure out a budget for what you should be spending and stick to it.

*Broaden your musical tastes.* Music is neither a demon to be feared nor a god to be idolized. It's simply a part of God's creation intended to serve his glory and our good. That means we can appreciate a wide variety of different styles and expressions of music. But when it comes to music, most of us know what we like and like what we know. We rarely venture out into new styles and genres. In fact, we excel at mocking the tastes of those we think are less musically informed—people who like country, opera, or pop, for instance. Try asking your friends with different musical tastes to suggest songs or albums you should listen to. Discover what they enjoy about a particular style or artist and what aspect of God's glory you might be missing by not listening to it.

*Listen to old music.* Human beings have been making music at least since the fourth chapter of Genesis, where we're told that Jubal "was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe" (Gen. 4:21). A lot of music has been written, sung, and recorded since then. And yet we can still think the best music is what was produced in the past ten years—or worse, what's coming out next month. Music that stands the test of time is worth giving our attention to. That doesn't mean everything written in the past is great music. But we're shortsighted, proud, and poorer if we never appreciate the music God has given us throughout history.

*Intentionally thank God every time you enjoy music.* Music is a gift from God. But God never intends his gifts to replace him as the object of our desire and delight. Music may be able to calm our hurried spirits, encourage our troubled hearts, and strengthen our weary souls—but not like our Savior can. He has redeemed us by his death, sympathizes with us in our weaknesses, and is able to give us mercy and grace in our time of

need (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 4:15–16). Music, like all of God’s gifts, is meant to draw our hearts and attention to his glory, his power, and his love.

We can use music to deepen our love for God in countless ways. The most obvious way is proclaiming God’s truth together in corporate worship, pouring out our hearts to him in song, encountering his presence. Some people find it helpful to sing with or listen to a worship CD during their private devotions. But as we’ve seen, God isn’t concerned only about music in “religious” settings. He intends us to use music for his glory everywhere. As we listen to a skilled jazz guitarist or a concert pianist, we can thank God for his gifts of creativity, talent, sound, and beauty. A new mother singing a lullaby can reflect on God’s tenderness and mercy. Playing CDs on different occasions can provide moving accompaniment that heightens the significance of important moments and relationships.

Ultimately, music is a means of deepening our love for and enjoyment of the One who gave us this gift in the first place. In *The Weight of Glory*, C. S. Lewis expressed it like this:

The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them. . . . For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.

No music, however beautiful, however impressive, however technologically creative or emotionally moving, can rival the wonder and breathtaking beauty of the Savior, who came as a man to live a perfect life and die an atoning death in our place.

Giving up, reducing, or changing your music diet may feel like a sacrifice. It just might be. You may have to sacrifice looking cool to your friends to please your heavenly Father. You might have to sacrifice slavery to earthly appetites and pleasures so you can pursue and enjoy eternal ones. (Can we even call those sacrifices?)

But no sacrifice we make compares to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He redeemed us to purchase our forgiveness and to earn us a place among those who “no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:15).

That means music is no longer ours to use however we want. It never was. It was never meant to provide what can be found only in a relationship with the Savior.

Music is a precious gift, but it makes a terrible god.

By God's grace, may we always know the difference.

Mahaney, C. J., Piper, J., Harvey, D., Kauflin, B., Purswell, J., Cabaniss, C., & C. J. Mahaney, E. (2008). [Worldliness \(foreword by john piper\): resisting the seduction of a fallen world](#). Crossway.