

The Gift of Music/Instrumental

A gifted story: He is an accomplished flutist. In fact, he teaches flute at the university. It would be fair to call Paul a professional. In his concerts he is appreciated for his fine performances. Some would call it a miracle that Paul, a sickly boy who took up the flute because the doctor thought it might help him build up his lung capacity, can play so beautifully. Maybe that is why he loves to fill a church with his free-flowing and personal rendition of Amazing Grace. People have been known to weep as the notes escalate up and descend down the scale, "I once was lost and now am saved..." The words come to mind as the sound penetrates the air. "He has a gift," people say. Indeed he does, a spiritual gift of instrumental music.

Biblical references:

1 Sam. 16:23 - From then on, whenever the evil spirit sent by God came on Saul, David would get his harp and play it. The evil spirit would leave, and Saul would feel better and be all right again. Psalm 33:1-3 (Exultate, justi) - Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous; it is good for the just to sing praises. Praise the Lord with the harp; play to him upon the psaltery and lyre. Sing for him a new song; sound a fanfare with all your skill upon the trumpet.

Psalm 150 - (Laudata Dominum) Hallelujah! Praise God in his holy temple; praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts; praise him for his excellent greatness. Praise him with the blast of the ram's-horn; praise him with the lyre and harp. Praise him with timbrel and dance; praise him with strings and pipe. Praise him with resounding cymbals; praise him with loud clanging cymbals. *Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah!*

Definition and comment:

The gift of instrumental music: the special gift whereby the Spirit enables certain Christians to praise God through instrumental music in such a way as to enhance the worship experience of other believers. It gives the believer the desire and capability to express personal faith and provide inspiration and comfort through the playing of a musical instrument. Like the gift of vocal music, the key to understanding this gift is not so much the beautiful sounds or the skill with which the notes are delivered, but the inspiration behind the delivery. The spiritual aspect of the gift is revealed as the gift bearer gives witness to love and praise for the Lord, and thus glorifies God. Listeners become inspired to feel the presence and majesty of God when music uplifts their soul in a manner that brings them closer to their Lord.

It takes years of learning and practice to develop a talent for playing a musical instrument into a level of skill at a performance level. Sheer determination and hard work on the part of the person are requisites for accomplishment. Once achieved, the instrumentalist is able to perform to great effect and enjoyment of audiences. Spiritual giftedness comes into play only in those cases where there is a deep desire to use the accomplishment thus attained in a manner that glorifies God. There is recognition that God provided the initial ability and a drive to use it to witness faith - to bring others to understand the love and presence of God.

Affirm that you have this gift; questions to ask yourself:

1. When you play your instrument, do you feel the presence of God?
2. Do you see your ability to play an instrument as your means of sharing God with others?
3. Do you feel that your music helps people get in touch with their emotions in a helpful way?
4. Do you sense a gifted power and ease in playing your instrument that at times seems to transcend your own capabilities?
5. Were your talents in music evident even at an early age?

Areas for study and personal growth:

1. Proficiency with your instrument is obviously very important. Are you giving yourself adequate time to practice? Are you able to consider further lessons to enhance your skills? Is your instrument in good condition, or are you in need of a better quality instrument?

2. Knowing where you can make a contribution with your instrument is something you will have to determine yourself as most members of the congregation (pastor included) will not know of your proficiency or willingness to play. Make your willingness to perform known to the music director, and look for ways that your gift might be utilized within the church to glorify God and inspire others to know of God's love and presence.
3. Strengthen the tie between your playing and your prayer life so that your playing will become an act of prayer for God's glory. Meditate on why you have been given this gift, and seek to use it in ways you believe fulfill its purpose in you.
4. There are many references to music in scripture, especially in the Psalms. Spend time internalizing the Psalms so that they become familiar examples to you of how music is used to praise God.
5. Begin gathering a music library of spiritual songs that you know and can play from memory. Use this repertoire when providing accompaniment for songfests or evening home sings. Work with people gifted in singing to develop musical programs and special performances. Record your music on tapes for the shut in.

General ways to use the gift of music/instrumental:

- Personally: help family and friends learn how to appreciate music as an important component in a balanced life; teach others how music uplifts the soul.
- Within the church: assist the choir on special occasions; be a music leader (see more specific church service opportunities in the Booklet *Channels for Using the Gifts*).
- Within the wider community: play in an ensemble for performances of religious works.

For reflection:

Music played instrumentally brings out emotions within us that are an important part of our essence as human beings. We thus renew the discovery that our souls can be stirred by beauty in a cleansing way. When you exercise your gift you bring balm to harried souls in need of a touch of God's peace. As a musician you have learned how to entertain with your music. The added dimension your spiritual gift offers is a quality of love from God, an outreaching from him through your music. In your playing you become his instrument of peace.

Music is part of God's nature. He has inspired great composers throughout the ages to blend the sounds of musical instruments in moving ways. He has inspired craftsmen to build many fine instruments. And he has given musicians talent to use the fruits of the composer and craftsman to fill the air with heart-gladdening sounds. And to some he adds a special quality of sweetness and power, a richness and sensitivity, a depth and exquisiteness. They combine in a glorious manner to lift the listener above the worldly plain for a time, suspended by God's grace in your hands. Made in the image of God, though man may not realize it, he has in his heart the capacity, indeed the need, to be lifted in music. Through you God will fill that need and draw both the listener and instrumentalist ever closer to him.

Make a joyful sound unto the Lord!