



Healing Music



"Making time for music is making time for healing of body, mind and spirit."

Our external world is noisy. If we sit still for a moment and close our eyes we can perhaps hear sounds from the street outside, a buzzing florescent light, the wind rustling the leaves and a chirping bird. All are sounds which our senses and brain are processing, but it is not all auditory. Sometimes we feel the passing of a large truck in our chest. Sometimes we actually feel pain when a sound system exhibits feedback. The body has its own rhythms and sounds as well: heartbeat, respiratory rate, the movement of molecules into and out of cells. The rhythm of life. As we begin our journey of wellness (Please look for Wellness Wheel booklets in church narthex), let us not forget the healing power of music through our "rhythm of days".

Healing music can be described as an agent used to help make the human body whole. Just because the word healing is placed in front of the word music does not mean that music can cure. Healing music is a holistic mechanism causing a chain reaction, which can affect the physical body, the emotions and the spirit. Our responses to music are physiological, emotional, intellectual and/or spiritual.

In 1989, music therapists from the University of Washington described five human responses to music: distraction, imaging, emotions, catharsis and relaxation. By distracting the patient from fear or pain, music can hold one's attention and alter one's perception of time. Distraction eases the mind, alleviating unpleasant mental processes, giving a time out or rest. The mind's focus is now somewhere else. Listening to melodies can sometimes arouse pleasant thoughts and memories. This is a way for the brain to "be" somewhere else. Perceptually, the imaging is so strong that pain becomes secondary in occupying the patient's consciousness. Music facilitates spiritual advancement through emotions. The act of creating music can be an expression of painful or joyful emotions. Words may not be wholly effective in communicating feelings and emotions. Recent research indicates that stressful stimuli can suppress the immune system. Music can facilitate relaxation. Listening to music that is easy, slow paced and soft can facilitate deep breathing and relax the muscles in the body.

We have some intuitive knowledge about certain music for certain settings. A Sousa march would not be an appropriate choice for relaxing in a dentist chair, but would work in an aerobics studio. We know that a Gregorian chant or a Native American flute would be more restful than a polka. During the course of applying healing music at the bedside, the three major elements that affect the listener the most are rhythm, harmony and melody. Studies show that music can be effective in stabilizing the rhythms of the body. A 1995 study in a NICU showed that for those premature babies who listened to gentle rhythmic lullabies, "heart rates and breathing rates were closer to normal than in the babies where no music was applied."

David may have been one of the world's first music therapists. He and his "patient" Saul, certainly realized that the shepherd's playing and singing were keys to feeling better. (1 Sam. 16:23) Now research has proven that music lifts moods and feelings, promotes relaxation by lowering heart rate and blood pressure, eases pain, helps in the exploration of personal feelings, stimulates communication and allows spiritual expression. **As you go through times of suffering and stress, don't neglect to take advantage of God's gift of music.** Find some good CDs, tapes or radio stations to play. Try to give the music your full attention as you close your eyes and listen. Or if you are able, sit down and play that instrument that has been put aside. Or just find the right time and place to open your mouth and sing whatever comes to mind and heart making a "joyful noise unto the Lord".

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Sources: Excerpts from *The Healing Musician* by Stella Benson. 1999 and NIV Encouragement Bible, Zondervan, 2001, p. 367