



TIME OF GRACE®

The Miracle and Message of Music

Study Notes

Summary

What kind of connection is there between God and music? We often take music for granted but, Pastor Mike reminds us, it is a miracle that the Bible has so much to say about. Pastor Mike covers two big ideas that attest to the power of God and music.

- Music is a near _____.
- Psalm 139:14 — ¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
- The Message is a true _____.
- Ephesians 2:8,9 — ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

Points to Ponder

1. This week, pay closer attention to the message of Christian music. Encourage each other to marvel at the miracle of music.

Time of Grace Ministry
The Miracle and Message of Music
Psalm 139:14; Ephesians 2:8.9
November 13, 2022

Pastor Mike Novotny

Before I ever heard of a Spotify playlist, or created my first iTunes account, or told Alexa on my little smart device to play my favorite music, my musical selection looked like this. Do you all remember this? This is just a great reminder why Steve Jobs made a lot of money, right? Not quite as portable as the iPod. I found my old CD case in the basement the other day. And as I paged through and look at all the discs, I had to laugh at my own musical history.

In these pages, I found some old school Toby Mac and some classic hits of Tupac. I found Daddy Yankee, Enrique Iglesias, Mana, and Ricky Martin. I had a page with Boys to Men, classic, original NSYNC. In fact, I had a whole page over here of NSYNC so, no judging, this is church. I found Metallica. I found Aerosmith. There was Billy Joel and Audio Adrenaline. I have a whole selection of Broadway musicals. I have a piano collection with the romance of Jim Brickman. And I had the driving, hard, irreverent lyrics of the one and only Tenacious D.

I had to laugh as I looked through this, just thinking of what music has meant throughout my life. I've been a father for 13 years, a pastor for 14 years, but I have been a music lover for much longer. And I bet you have, too. You might not share my musical taste in Metallica or Toby Mac, but I don't think I've ever met anyone who does not like music. There's just something about it that seems to resonate with everyone. I might put it this way. Music is a lot like butter. It just makes everything better. Can you imagine celebrating a wedding without music? Can you imagine how much less emotional and powerful a funeral would be without Grandpa's favorite song? Can you imagine how awkward an elevator ride could be without the lame music in the back? Picture a big blockbuster movie without a soundtrack? Or a coach's inspirational speech without the speakers pumping the kids' favorite songs. It's like music takes almost everything in life and moves it up one notch. Isn't that true?

My best example. How many of you have seen the classic American film "Napoleon Dynamite"? It's a sign of the end times here when half the hands go up. Yeah. So, of course we have. Do you remember, it's like the best part of the movie, he's prepared his choreographed dance, you've seen this, and he comes out and the Jamiroquai starts playing and he's dancing and everyone loves it? And then the music cuts, remember this? And it is the most awkward, cringey moment ever. What's the difference between the two? Same dance moves, same kid. It's music. There are some times in life when it's okay to shut off the music and enjoy some stillness and silence. But for most of the things we go through in life, the ups, the downs, the grief, the sorrow, the breakups or the bringing two people together in the bonds of marriage, music just makes everything better.

But here's my big question for you today. Have you ever stopped to think about the connection between God and music? Like, there's a musical part of your story. Maybe there's the spiritual part of your story. Have you ever thought of the connection between the two? Because this book, the Bible, has so, so much to say about that question. You know, really early in the Bible, when God saved Moses and the enslaved people of Israel, as soon as they made it out of the Red Sea, the first thing that millions of people did was sing. Or jump ahead to the New Testament where a virgin girl named Mary is told by an angel that she's about to have a baby and his name will be Jesus. Within ten verses in the Bible, do you know what that virgin does? She sings. Or Jesus himself. He's eating dinner with his friends on Thursday night. By Friday morning, he will be dying on a cross. Do you know what he does between those two events? The Bible says he sang.

The Old Testament is filled with a collection of 150 songs called the Psalms. And the New Testament says that when we teach and encourage each other, we should do it through songs, hymns, and spiritual songs. The Bible is not Broadway, but it is intensely musical. And today I want to try my best to tell you why. Today I want to talk to you about the miracle that is music. And I'm just going to cover two things. I promise the band I'd keep it shorter than normal so they could play an extra song long. So, I'm going to try to keep my word, which probably will not happen, but I'm going to do my best up here. If you're taking notes in your program, I'd love you to write this down.

Here's the first big thing I want to share with you today, that music is a near miracle. Music itself, the sense of sound, is a God given near miracle. Now, to prove that, I want to invite Jonathan back up on stage. He's going to grab his guitar because he and I have been practicing all day to share with you a near miracle. You ready, Jonathan? This is a big moment. All right. All right let's do this. Three, two, one. Yes! We did it. I don't think they got to do it again. Do it again. Okay, now you think we're both really lame. Thank you for the token laughter up here in the front. The reason I call this a near miracle is because you're so used to it. A real miracle is technically a violation of the natural laws that God set into the universe. What you heard was following the natural laws. But have you ever slowed down long enough to think how crazy that just was? When Jonathan played this note -- do it one more time, an open E string, a sound wave traveling 329.63 Hz burst from his guitar or through the speakers and those invisible waves through down the waxy tunnels of your ear. Struck a little instrument inside your head called the eardrum. It vibrated the three bones of your inner ear, which sent a spiral of fluid, this wave, through your inner ear, called the cochlea. Inside your cochlea, 20 to 30,000 tiny hairs that you can't see, each tuned to a different frequency, started to wiggle. And depending on which one's wiggled, an electric signal was sent to your brain.

You still with me? And up to ten parts of your brain sprung into action with that note. They heard the sound. If Jonathan will play a whole chord or start to strum, it would start to pick up harmonies. It could pick up rhythms, help your brain anticipate the note that's coming next. If you ever clapped your hands or stamped your foot, it's because your brain is springing into action. If the tune sounded familiar, memories are stirring. Chemicals like dopamine are being released. You're bonding with the person you're dancing with. And all of that happens when Jonathan does this. Boom. Boom. Which is why you need to give Jonathan a round of applause for that near miracle. Thank you, Jonathan. It's insane. You and I are so used to the way our

brains work. Our ears hear, our eyes see. But when you actually think about it, it is a near miracle.

Let me show you this passage. One lyric in an ancient song in the Bible says this, "God, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." That's true. The way that you and I were made for music is wonderful. Like, if you're a person that doesn't believe in God, it really forces you to stop and wonder how did that happen? 20 to 30,000 tiny hairs inside a little snail shell that I can't even see. Each one wiggles at just the right time so I can hear some music is beautiful. So, the pleasure chemicals are released. That is full of awe and wonder. Just hearing is such a blessing.

I was actually reminded of that just a couple of days ago in my office. If you would appear through my office windows right when "Mile of Music" was starting, you would have seen a grown man on the verge of crying. I was preparing for today and I found one of those videos on YouTube where a deaf child is hearing for the first time. Ever seen one of those? The one that I saw had this young mother, she sat down in a chair. Her little less than one year old is on her lap. And the one-year-old is facing her big sister, maybe five or six years old. And the doctor has just put the implants right here on her head that will allow the electrical signals to get to her brain. And the big sister with a big smile says, are you my baby sister? And the baby's eyes get really big. She's at first confused by what her brain is processing. But then this little kid, she smiles. And then she starts to giggle. Like big kid belly laugh giggle. She can't stop, she's giggling so much. And her sister starts to giggle, and her sister starts to cry. And the camera person starts to shake. And the mom says, who's holding her, looking at the back of her daughter's head, she says, "you can hear me." And I think for the first time in her life, her daughter turns her head. And she's this close to her mother with this big smile. And mom starts crying. And I'm not crying right now. You're crying right now. And the video ended after a few minutes and I thought, "Just hearing is such a blessing."

You know, good music -- any kind of music is a gift, right? The thump of drums, the gift of a good guitarist, the harmonies intertwining, it doesn't even really need to say anything to be pleasurable, right? This happened, maybe when you were a teenager and your parents were like, "Well, what is this song about?" And you said, "I don't know. It's cool." You know, music doesn't necessarily need a message to be powerful, but when you can combine good music with a good message, doesn't something amazing happen in your heart? Right, like when the solo at the funeral has a message that just touches your grief? When the joy of that first dance, the lyrics sink into your heart.

Just yesterday I was sitting on the floor of an Irish bar here in town during our music festival. I arrived late. Apparently, the artist, I'd never heard of him before, was the third-place person on The Voice a few seasons ago. And so, I'm sitting in this Irish bar, and he says he's going to sing a song about the brown UPS hat that he's wearing, and I'm thinking, "Oh, this is going to be great." But then like a great musician, he starts to tell the story that the hat was from his father-in-law, this just hardworking man, raised his family, did what he could, provided. And he had given his son-in-law, not just his hat, but I would find out the hat was a metaphor because the man had given the musician something even more valuable, his daughter's hand in marriage. And I'm

sitting on the floor of the Irish bar, my 13-year-old next to me and suddenly, a song about an old brown hat turned into metaphor for fathers handing their daughters over into another man's arms, and I'm looking around like, "Am I the only one that this is getting to?" As you can imagine, I mean, he made it big on a reality show. His voice, his talent was just insane. He didn't have to say anything, and I would have been impressed, but when he said something while he played something, that's when things get good.

And so, I want you to write this down, it's our last big point for today. Not just music but the message is a true miracle. When you can embed a message, and I capitalize the 'M' up on that screen for a reason, the Message, the most amazing Message, that is something that digs deep into our heart, and I can tell you that from experience. If you would force me to choose my favorite song in this entire collection, I would be very, very tempted to choose "Mo money, Mo problems" by the Notorious B.I.G. featuring Puff Daddy and Mase. Not the most Christian song, sorry mom, but that's my jam, right? It's probably number two on my list, but there's actually a song I love even more, and it's this one. It's a song called "Worlds Apart" by a '90s Christian band called Jars of Clay. And that song, "Worlds Apart," you can look it up later today, it spoke so deeply to me because it spoke about me. About someone who knew better, who couldn't make excuses, who in his pride had fallen one more time.

That message, not just the music, not just the talent, it was the message that spoke to me. And maybe lots of you today have felt that way in a spiritual sense. Maybe you're an addict, maybe you're not, maybe your struggle was mine and maybe it isn't, but have you ever just found yourself when the sound is done, and the music is over, and you're staring at your bedroom ceiling, and you're asking yourself, "Why did I do that? Why did I say that?" Maybe you really want to get a hold of your drinking, someone that loves you, is concerned for you, but then, in a moment.

Maybe you're an artist and you just want to be grateful for the chance to share your music, but sometimes when the crowds are thin, and all the people at the festival go to someone else's stage and the rest of them are checking their phones and leaving after your second song, it's hard not to be bitter, not to be angry, not to be envious. Maybe you're in a relationship and you know that you've got to pick your battles and let little things slide, but sometimes in the moment just her tone, his attitude, it annoys you so much you can't contain what's in your heart. Maybe you're the parent that just knows that what kids need more than anything in the world, they don't need money, they don't club sports, they need attention. And yet you come home after a long day and you pay attention to that little rectangle instead of that little face. And you know better, and you want to be better but you're not better. If you're anything like me, and you do the things you don't want to and you don't do the things you do want to, what do you say to God?

My favorite song could tell you. See, that song "Worlds Apart," did not just connect with my guilt and my regret, it connected me to grace. It spoke of a Jesus, who even though his holy heart was so worlds apart from my own broken one, that he would draw near to a person like me. That he would show me this love that was, honestly, baffling and undeserved. He would smile down from Heaven upon me and I had no right to look up into his loving eyes, but he did.

This is the capital "M" Message of the Christian faith. And it's what makes us sing that God so loved the world that he gave. He didn't demand, he didn't lecture, he gave his one and only Son. That there is joy in the house of God when we gather. And we will not be silent, we shout out his praise. It is not just good music that stirs our souls, it is music embedded with the best message in all of human history.

Let me show you one of the best Bible passages to describe this message. Ephesian 2 says, "For it is by grace that you have been saved," grace means undeserved love. "Through faith. And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast." How do you get saved? How do you escape the danger of God's anger? If you've messed up so many times, if you know you're not as good as you should be, where do you go? The Bible's answer is grace. "But I haven't done enough to earn it." The Bible says, "That's why it's grace." "Well, what do I got to do to get it?" The Bible says, "It's a gift. Receive it. Believe it."

God won't make you climb up a ladder to heaven, scale a mountain to find it. He just comes down through the life, and death, and resurrection of Jesus, and gives it to people like me so we don't have to stare at the ceiling and wonder why we're not better. Instead, we can confess and then receive that we're still loved, and we're still good, and his face is still shining upon us from Heaven. And much like the festival held in our community this weekend, this gift is absolutely free.

Now, I don't know if I will see many of you ever again. Some of you are here from out of town. Some of you are stopping in to try this out, so, let me, before I say amen, give you my best pitch. If you don't have a frequent connection with grace, with God through his son Jesus, with a church family that can constantly remind you of the one thing that your soul truly wants to sing, it's waiting. His arms are open, and the doors are, too. Or to put it in the way of an ancient artist, he will give you a life that is filled with amazing grace. I want to invite Jonathon up here one more time because I cannot possibly preach a message about the message of grace, without leaving you with one song. It's one of the most famous songs in English speaking history. You've probably heard it before. Let's see if you recognize it as Jonathon starts to play it. Pick up the melody? Do you know the message behind this music?

Back in the 1700's, there was a man named John Newton who was wretched. He made his living transporting African bodies across the Atlantic. He was a slave trader. Until the moment where he stopped being blind to the evil and he saw it. Which means he saw himself. What do you do when you try to pray to God, and you didn't just lose your patience, or spend a little bit too much money, but you sold your fellow man for money. The thought to him was repulsive. It was wretched. Who could save a man like him? But then he found grace. And he couldn't yawn when he saw it, he couldn't say good morning when he walked into church. There was something so profoundly amazing about a God who would love him, not when he was at his best, but when he was at the bottom. And so, John Newton, this pastor from the 1700's, he was also a musician. And he wrote these lyrics, and some of you have heard them before. And today I want you to sing them with me. So, can I invite you to please stand, as we sing with John Newton, with every Christian who has been saved by grace of the amazingness of God's love. Let's sing.

Amazing Grace,
How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I was once lost,
But now am found,
Was blind
But now I see.

I could have just said that. There's something about music, isn't there? Especially music with a message. Friends, what you just heard when you closed your eyes was good. But if you follow Jesus, there's something so much better. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for being you. You had every right to come as just a teacher, to applaud our good, to call out our bad. You had every right to come as judge, but you didn't. You came to seek and save those who are lost. You came to find a Christian kid like me, starting at his bedroom ceiling, wondering what to say. You came, not just for some, but for all, Jesus, and that is why we love you. That's why Christianity is not limited to any culture, but people from every tribe, every continent, billions of voices today will lift up one name, your name, the saving name of Jesus.

I pray to you, God, that you would burst through any barrier that is here today. For anyone who's had a bad experience in church, who has heard only about the rules and rituals of religion but has never known a relationship based on grace. Break through that experience and draw them to your side.

Help us to love each other well, God. These past few days we have seen such shocking examples of hospitality and generosity, and love from so many people in this community. This is just a glimpse of something greater. Help us to be better people as we think about the way that we're loved. Help us to listen to the music of grace, to really think about that message, to hear it deep down, and may it change us from within, so that we love better and try harder, not to earn your affection, but because it's already ours.

Give us peace, joy, contentment deep in our hearts. And may grace always seem amazing to our souls. We pray this all in the beautiful name of your holy son Jesus Christ. And all God's people who agreed, they said... Amen. Jesus and all God's people said, amen.