



Studying ... Music?

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Being a student is one of the most exciting times of your life. Unfettered by the constraints of home and school, you suddenly find yourself free to make of life what you want. Apart from the odd lecture (and for arts students, it's rarely more than the odd lecture) you find that you've got all this time on your hands! But with freedom comes responsibility that can prove to be troubling. 'What do I get involved with?' For the musician, especially, that can be a problem, as there will be so much choice. Chapel choirs, chamber orchestras, wind bands; the college music society, opera society, ballroom dancing club. 'Which one should I join?'

The answer to the problems of choice is in knowing your priorities; and so for the Christian music student, the solution should be easy – put God first, and the rest of the choices should take care of themselves. But even then it is not always simple. For even when you have decided to put God first no matter what, the exact place that music fits is unclear.

Allow me to be autobiographical; I remember as a first year music student feeling confounded by a sense of split loyalty. My heart's first allegiance was to God – I wanted to put Him first. But I was still a musician, and wasn't sure what God wanted me to do with it. I was left with a host of questions: how do my Christian faith and my music fit together? What does it mean to be a Christian and a musician? Is God even interested in it?

Much of what lay behind the struggle was an awareness that I easily made too much of music and often made an idol of it. So I became rather

half-hearted in it. Reading the Bible and going to church felt more reliably spiritual activities; music felt a bit of a liability. And yet apart from idolising it, God had gifted me in it and I did enjoy it. How did it relate to my faith and what exactly did God want me to do with it? Throw myself into it? Or give it up completely? Maybe a safe option was to play in church.

Add to this a usual young person's struggle of identity. Was I a Christian musician, or a musical Christian? I felt a divided man. I was a Christian; I had become one at age 14. But a big part of me felt like a musician. In one way more so, because I had been a musician for at least 6 years longer than I had been a Christian. Only that made me feel guilty, because I knew God should have my priority; surely I was a Christian first. Yet George the musician remained. The problem was that I couldn't seem to fit the two parts together; they seemed at odds with each other.

Maybe you can relate to that. You want to honour God with your musical studies, but you're not sure what that means. Maybe you're even fearful that serving God and being a musician are polar opposites and so you feel guilty about doing music or wanting to do it.

As I have grown, I have seen the answer to this dichotomy. The good news is that there does not have to be a dichotomy. It is possible to be a wholehearted Christian and a wholehearted musician if you start in the right place. And that Place is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is big enough to give meaning to every one of your gifts and every part of your personality. For everything finally relates to Him. It is important to grasp that being a Christian and being a musician are not at odds because Christ claims all of you for his own, including the musical part.

Knowing Christ also helps to put music in the place that it belongs. There is a very real danger for us musicians to idolise music and put it in the number one spot in our lives. It can become a main source of comfort as the first thing we do to soothe ourselves in a crisis is turn to our favourite CD. It can become the main purpose in life, as we let our lives revolve around becoming the best player or academic. And it can become our primary identity as 'being a musician' becomes more about who we are than what we do. But

Music was never meant to carry such freight; so if you try and make it so, it will quickly disappoint you. Only Christ can be your all, your life, your everything. In Him you really do have everything – a fail-safe comfort, for He will never let you go; a purpose exciting enough to captivate your heart – to know, honour and obey Him in every area of life; and an identity that is secure even beyond death. Whatever else happens to you, you belong to Christ and He belongs to you.

Though in order to avoid idolatry there may be particular situations or circumstances when it is right to pull back from musical activity [1], in the long run the problem of idolising music is not solved by giving it up altogether. For the problem lies not with music *per se*, which is good in itself, but with our hearts. If we give up music completely, hoping that doing so will solve the problem of idolatry, we will quickly be disappointed as we soon start to idolise something else instead. Thus it is in our hearts that the problem of idolatry needs to be addressed: that is, at its source. And that can only be done through the gospel. Yet the answer to the problem of idolatry is not necessarily to give music up. Not in the long run. Idolatry occurs when a good gift of God takes over and becomes more important than God Himself. Thus we take the gift and ignore the Giver. The gospel's answer to idolatry is to command us to put God back at the centre again and so to shrink that good gift down to its proper size before Him. As we do this, we find that we can still enjoy the gift with thanks because as we put God back at the centre, we recognize that it was He who gave it to us in the first place. Yet now we bring the gift under His rule.

The key to doing this is to understand the Lordship of Christ. For until we recognize that Christ claims Lordship over every area of life, and grasp what that means for every area of life, we will fail to serve Him as musicians.

What does the Lordship of Christ mean? It is simply this: to be under new management in life. Before we become Christians, we are in slavery to a cruel master: sin. We can do nothing but serve him. And the wages he demands for our service is death. But, on the cross, Jesus dies in our place. He pays the wages sin demands. So, when we trust Him, it is as though He buys us

back. We are free from sin's enslavement as Christ becomes our new Master. We are owned by Him and so are to live to please Him. 2 Corinthians 5:15 sums this up well: *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

That's all very well, but why should Christ be interested in my music? Is He not only interested in my going to church and reading my Bible? He is interested in music because of Who He is. He is not only the Redeemer but the Creator. He made everything in the world: *For by Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him* (Colossians 1:16). That includes music. Christ is the rightful owner of it; it should be done for Him. Now because of sin, we do not see everything under the ownership of Christ. But one day we will, for God's great purpose is to bring *all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ* (Ephesians 1:10). That is the gospel project – to redeem everything under the Lordship of Christ.

Christ died for you and so owns you, all of you. His purpose for you is to bring more and more of your life under His rule. Growing in holiness must include, then, thinking about how the Lord Jesus wants you to honour Him in your musical studies. In your reading, playing, practising.

Grasping that I am to study music for Christ is quite liberating for it means freedom to enjoy your studies. But it also gives those studies a purpose, because when you do what you do for Christ, you give it eternal worth. From practice to writing an essay, from singing in the choir to listening to a concert, all becomes an act of service to our Master, for which we will receive *an inheritance from the Lord as a reward* (Colossians 3:24).

But as well as freedom and purpose, belonging to Christ also means responsibility. If Christ claims Lordship of all of life, suddenly all of life has to change. Sin and selfishness affect every area of our lives and personalities, so to seek to honour Christ in every area will invariably be a life-time's struggle with many failures on the way. But even as we fail, the gospel gives us the security to try again, for *there is now no condemnation for those*

who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

So, this is the theme which this paper will seek to examine: what does the Lordship of Christ over music and musical studies mean in practice? I want to show what Christ's Lordship looks like for the musician in three broad areas: the mind, the emotions, and the will. The principles below could easily apply to any academic discipline but are written with the musician in mind.

The Mind

The temptation for the Christian student is to think that God is not interested in their studies. He is. Not only are we to work hard, but also to let His Word shape our thinking. And since we will spend most of our days as students thinking about music, it is only right that we try to judge what we read and hear by a Christian worldview.

Again, this stems from grasping that, in a famous phrase, all truth is God's truth. That is, the source of all truth in the world is Him. This includes truth across the musical disciplines! So, as you study counterpoint, you are learning a little more of the way in which the world He made works and fits together. As you listen to a Mahler symphony, you are hearing more of the diversity and beauty He has allowed to be a part of His world. Further, God's plan is for the whole universe to be redeemed under Christ (see Ephesians 1:10), including all knowledge. It follows from this that to think about music as a Christian will involve seeking to 'take every thought captive' to Christ. The goal of learning is not so much to fill my head with clever thoughts as much as to glorify God.

If that is the goal, the problem with secular academia is that it is by definition opposed to it. It runs on a different track. How is this seen? It is seen as much by direction as detail. So, you probably wouldn't expect your lecturers to launch attacks on the authority of Scripture in your lectures on Harmony and Counterpoint or the history of polyphony, indeed, nor should you. The problem is not the detail, but in the underlying assumptions of the courses you take. These assumptions may well lie unspoken, but they will be there in some form. What are they? In short, a denial that there is such a thing as Truth. A denial

that, in one writer's phrase, behind reality stands a Grand Universal that makes sense of all the little details.

Thus, for most of your lecturers, music will be all there is. There won't be a reference point for it, and if there is, it won't be God's truth. In such a situation, there will be a number of temptations.

First, to make pride (love for self) and not truth (love for God) the motive and goal of your academic study. To write long essays just to make yourself look good regardless of the honesty of the enquiry. Or to be lazy in study because you don't think it is important. Truth is important, so every essay is important. So don't just read the right books to answer the questions, but try to get inside the question and give it honest enquiry. This may mean exploring beyond the scope of the tutor's suggestions. If writing an essay on sonata form in Mozart, also look at Haydn; if writing a Bach chorale, go and listen to the *St John Passion* with a score. Use each essay as an opportunity to dig deeper and discover truth for yourself.

Then learn to think deeply about the details. Don't just chronicle the development of the scale or write about a few bars of sonata form in Mozart; try to get behind them. Delve into the worldview of the particular historical period. Before the Enlightenment much musical development was tied to religious establishments so were naturally close to questions of theology. Even outside of the church, music rarely developed on its own. Of any period you study, seek to discover what bearing the prevailing cultural assumptions about man and God and knowledge and life had on the development of music.

If you do this, not only will you enjoy your studies more, but your understanding of music will grow holistically, not just as an entity divorced from bigger questions of truth.

The second temptation for the Christian music student in the secular academy will be to study music itself without reference to God. Take, for example, the way you understand beauty. Beauty is the currency that musicians deal in, but without God, beauty is meaningless. For He created it; beauty points beyond itself to Him. But take Him out of the equation and all you're left with is the

aesthetic experience. And if you take God out of the equation, the danger will be to idolise that aesthetic experience. Non-Christian musicians live for the experience music gives. And they see nothing beyond it. Seek to be different. Let the complexity of a Bach fugue or the colourful orchestration of Stravinsky lead you to marvel at the God who stands behind it. And let love for Him drive you to pursue beauty as you work hard to analyse and understand the music. Take God with you into the practice room or listening room. And as you enjoy it, remember that it is a gift from God - so thank Him for it.

If beauty is one area of music that relates to God, a related area is aesthetics. Aesthetic theories seek to explain all of music's various parts together under one theory. But again, if God created the universe, it is only His truth that is big enough to make sense of everything. He makes sense of both the objective dots on the page and the subjective experience of listening to them. Most aesthetic theories emphasise one or the other; learn to think of both as meaningful [2]. Learn to put Him at the centre of your thinking about music

A third temptation will arise in the area of music history. As music is generally studied as though it is unrelated to other disciplines, it means that you will be encouraged to engage with it as such. And since much music is by nature of its sacred context related to questions of theology, the temptation will be to think that those questions of theology are unimportant. You will be encouraged to ignore questions of theology where they have a bearing on the course of music history and will be asked to make musical judgements apart from judging the theological systems to which they are tied. This is relevant in, for example, assessing the development of Latin polyphony in the Catholic Church; the music is designed to articulate a particular Roman Catholic view of God.

To help with your reading, here are some questions that you could ask as you approach any musical historical text:

§ What are the questions being asked here?

§ What answers are being given?

§ What worldview are the answers coming out of?

o Does the author see truth as absolute or is it a matter of opinion?

o What gives this music meaning or significance, according to the author?

o How does the author account for the beauty of the music?

o Does God fit into the picture at all? Does the music under discussion have anything to do with church? If so, how is it linked to questions about God? Or about man's relationship to God?

§ How does that worldview compare with that of the Bible?

o Is truth grounded in God or in man?

o Is there a Universal big enough to give meaning to both objective and subjective?

o Is God the Triune Christian God? We can only know God through Jesus?

The Emotions [3]

It is a mark of the so-called musical temperament to feel deeply. That is one of the things that allows musicians to be musical. The ability to feel deeply is a great strength. Enjoying music can bring colour and joy to life. But like most great strengths it can also be a great weakness. Musicians, like other creative people, can struggle more than others with how they feel. They know the depths of human experience as well as the highs. We musicians can be oversensitive to life and its knocks.

This is especially the case for performing musicians. For the art of the performer more than that of other musicians is facilitated by his feelings. He pours himself into his music, and the more the better. But because he is sensitive to other's expectations, he can also be driven to despair by failure, to jealousy by the success of others, or to fear by nerves. More than driving the performer's music, in a real sense they can end up driving the performer.

This can be a source of special struggle for Christian musicians. For the Christian is not immune from failure, from gifted peers, from the pressure to succeed. And thus he is not immune from the accompanying feelings of despair,

jealousy or nervousness. Caught unawares, feelings of despair or fear or jealousy can end up driving the Christian too. Christ calls us to know ourselves, and to discipline ourselves.

But how? For to make matters worse, the Christian often feels these things in the area in which it hurts them the most – their relationship with God. Thus despair soon turns into feelings of abandonment by God, jealousy into anger towards God and nerves into complete forgetfulness about God.

Thankfully God has not left us alone to face our struggles. The gospel is a source of power and comfort that we can apply to our emotional problems. How? It is all a matter of security. Most emotional problems we face come out of insecurity, or misplaced security. If ultimately your security as a musician is in the quality of your performance, reputation, or the 'well done' of an audience or a teacher, then you will easily feel insecure when these things elude or fail you. You will feel devastated after playing badly, crushed by the criticism of others, or utterly restless in the face of competition. The answer is not to stop playing, but to work at building your security on the only place that it will never fail you – on Christ. For in Him you have a place of security that is unassailable by anything in life, whether failure, the successes of others or our nerves. Let me try and show how the gospel helps in each case.

Failure

Consider the dynamics of failure. Maybe in a competition or a recital that didn't go as well as you'd hoped. You made more mistakes than usual. Your presentation was poor. You didn't do your best and you know it. But everyone else does too, so you walk out unable to face anyone because you feel so shameful. But if you trust Christ, then you can fight this, for One more important than anyone in your audience already knows you, and even more deeply. God sees all your faults and failures. He knows that you're worse than just a few wrong notes because you are far more sinful than anyone can ever know; and yet He has forgiven you everything. And not just forgives you, but loves and delights in you as His child. Do you doubt it? Look at the cross. There God dealt with all your sin and failure once and for all. You can't improve on it or add to it by

feeling guilty. So face your failure and accept it, because you still have God's love. So you are secure. Pick yourself up, learn from it and start practising again.

Jealousy

If failure is bad, jealousy can be even more crippling. Maybe it's another friend in the department who plays the same instrument as you. Every time you sit down to play you think 'what's the point?' You feel useless compared to them. It's so unfair because they're probably younger than you and have never had to work at their playing or technique like you have. They can sight read anything and always learn the hardest pieces before anyone else. Jealousy can be all-consuming and so very destructive to you and your playing in the long run.

But again the gospel provides a remedy. For the issue again is one of security. You are jealous because your security as a player is being threatened by another. Which in turn means that your security is in your ability as a player. Your ultimate hope is being perfect, and that means that everyone who threatens that hope is the enemy. But that goal is sinking sand. For you can never be perfect; there will always be better musicians than you. We all have to face up to that truth, but to do so is very liberating. Yet to face it without giving up completely, we must have a better source of security. And again we have it in Christ. For in Him we don't need to strive to be perfect; we already are perfect. When we become Christians, God credits us with Jesus' perfection. When God looks at you he sees the perfect beauty of His Son. In Christ you are already perfect; so why spend energy striving for musical perfection – which will not last anyway? Learning this truth can free you from jealousy because it frees you from needing to be the best. And it can change you so that instead of feeling threatened by your peers, you can encourage them – even if they are better than you.

Nerves

What about nerves? Every performer knows about them. Some of you may have heard of the famous book that is devoted to fighting nerves called *The Inner Game of Music* [4]. Beating nerves is as much part of learning how to perform

well as is practising the notes. For on stage, nerves can cripple you, even if you can play all the notes in the practice room. I used to struggle a lot with nerves. My fingers would gently shake and be so sweaty that I would easily slip onto wrong notes. And then there was that sickening feeling in my stomach. But why do we get nervous? Nervousness is a kind of fear – a fear of failure. It is a step back from actual failure, but if not managed well can lead to it.

How can the gospel help in managing nerves and fear? By reshaping our perspective. For the problem with nerves is that they outgrow themselves. Nerves in small amounts are good and help us focus. But they easily get out of control and dominate the picture and we get things all out of perspective. The danger is small but we imagine it to be huge. The gospel reshapes perspective. It puts things back in their proper place because it puts God in His proper place. He sees all we do [5]; He is our most important audience. The opinion of whoever else is listening is just not as important as His. And what is His opinion? The gospel tells us - he approves of us already. As Dr Tim Keller has put it, we have the approval of the most important pair of eyes in the auditorium. So we don't need to worry about lesser opinions. We can relax and enjoy playing for Him because suddenly the opinion of everyone else matters less.

So you see, as you understand how God sees you in the gospel and how secure you are in Him, you will grow in feeling secure. It will not happen overnight and some days you will just struggle. But see yourself as God sees you and gradually the gospel will bring stability to your emotional world. The gospel will help you control the feelings of insecurity that so often define us and drive us. It will leave you content to leave your reputation, ability and ambitions in His hands and help you work quietly and contentedly for His smile.

The Will

We move now to the issue of behaviour. We will think about specific lifestyle temptations that you will no doubt face as music students. Not that the temptations will necessarily be different to others, but that the contexts you will find yourselves in will force the temptations on you in particular

ways. I am thinking of the whole area of godliness in action. This ranges from the classic student's battlegrounds of alcohol and sex to issues of committing to a church, maintaining a devotional life and sharing the gospel with friends. University will present many wonderful opportunities to grow spiritually. For the course you set at university will determine the course you set for the rest of your life. Deciding to put Christ first and make godly decisions whilst a student will only make it easier to keep doing those things afterwards.

What are the specific areas that music students will have to think through? I think they will be both about fighting temptation as well as striving for godliness.

Fighting temptation

Getting involved in musical societies and groups will quickly put you in situations of potential temptation. Whether you join a choir or orchestra, quartet or wind band you will quickly find a culture in which you will want to make a stand. This is easier if you are with other Christians, so seek out other Christians in your particular musical group. The choir I was involved in for three years as a student had a cliquy drinking culture – trips to the pub, sitting around late into the night after concerts drinking. Conversation would often gravitate towards gossip or innuendo. Sexual activity within the group was normal. I often felt out of my depth. Whilst we should resist the temptation to withdraw completely, it will be easier to stand for Christ if you decide your boundaries in advance. Be practical; decide how many pints you're going to drink and don't exceed it. If you're going to a post-performance party, decide in advance how long you're going to stay. Decide not to get involved in gossip conversations. And if you just can't cope in a situation, politely flee. Tours can be especially difficult here; I remember on one tour leaving the pub early because I couldn't cope with the conversation. It was difficult, but it eased my conscience.

Sexual temptation can be difficult for musicians too. This is compounded by the nature of a musician's work. An itinerant lifestyle means that musicians are often working alongside members of the opposite sex, sometimes in close quarters. Since musical collaboration also always involves a degree of emotional engagement with others, it

is also easy to quickly become emotionally involved with those you work with. Add to that the danger of loneliness coming from the solitary existence of many musicians and you have much potential for sexual sin. Again, the key is to know where you are prone to fall, think ahead and be wise. If you are weak in this area, avoid working alone with members of the opposite sex. When playing music intimately with others, avoid eye contact that could be misread. Watch out especially when you are tired or feeling especially vulnerable or needy. If you get yourself into a situation of potential sin, just flee. Don't flirt with members of the opposite sex. And gather good friends around you of the same sex, especially Christians. Above all pray daily that God would not lead you into temptation. As mentioned above, tours can be especially difficult in this area, when you are spending lots of time with the same group of people.

Whilst on the subject of tours, if you are going to be travelling a lot, it is worth deciding in advance not to miss church. If you're going to be away on a Sunday, see if you can find a church in the city you'll be playing in and invite any other Christians to come with you. If that's not an option, seek out other Christians in the group and pray with them. If you are on your own, try to keep up your own time of Bible reading and prayer. You will find it a lifeline!

Musicians who work professionally often struggle to meet regularly with Christians on Sundays because of the pressures of orchestra rehearsal schedules, so generally whilst at university, try to make church a priority. Resist the temptation to be a lone ranger. It won't always be possible, but try to make meeting with and praying with other Christians a regular part of your week.

Another area of potential compromise could be to do with gospel beliefs. This will be more an issue for organists and singers who may be asked to perform on Sundays or in ministry contexts that are at best dry and but at worst anti-evangelical. Your choir master may well not be Christian and your fellow singers may not care about Christian things. Or the services you sing in may not have any Biblical teaching in them. I think two things helped me in being involved with such a group as an organ scholar – the first was to see this sort of 'religious' context as a missionary context. To go

into the choir with a gospel motivation. The second was to make sure I was getting good Biblical teaching elsewhere. So if you join a choir that sings on Sundays, don't join one that will clash with your church. Make church a priority rather than choir.

Again there may be times when your conscience leads you to say no to being involved with certain groups. I remember one occasion on a choir tour abroad where we were due to sing for a Catholic Mass. Knowing a little about Catholic theology, I was unhappy with taking part in the Mass as I felt I would be condoning error by taking part. So I remember asking my choir master if I could sit out of singing because of my faith in Christ; I am very grateful to him that he allowed me to.

The battles you fight and how much you get involved will depend on the specifics of your situation. There are some battles that may not be worth fighting so pick them wisely. If in doubt, talk to an older, wiser Christian for advice.

And as you try to fight temptation, pray that those you play and work with would notice something different as you do.

Striving for godliness

As well as fighting against temptation, there will be lots of positive ways in which you can strive for godliness as a music student. Remember that this is God's plan for you, to make you more and more like Jesus. And there are many ways to grow.

The first is to work hard! Work at your music with all your heart. God has given you gifts in music so give your degree your best shot. Practice hard and be disciplined. Hand essays in on time; go to the lectures and respect your tutor. This will be a tremendous witness to those of your peers more prone to laziness, as well as to your tutors and lecturers. I recently heard of a Christian undergraduate who was brilliant, but always grateful, polite, respectful, diligent, pleasant to work with. This was noted by several members of staff. It makes the gospel attractive to see it lived.

But if diligence is attractive in the musical scene, humility is more so, because it is quite rare. Follow the example of Christ and seek to be a humble musician. Don't complain about how much

work or practice you have got to do and be quick to praise your colleagues and peers. Yes, be committed to excellence and discipline in your studies, but show that you care for others by getting to know them and giving them time, even if it eats into your own practice time. Musicians tend to hang around together so enjoying your favourite CD or going to a concert together shouldn't be too difficult!

Speaking of concerts and CDs, let me write a word here about culture. Culturally, university will offer you a rich experience if you will let it. As Christians we can affirm the existence of culture as a good thing because its existence springs from the call in Genesis to cultivate the earth (Gen 1:28). With Christ as Lord, we can see and enjoy culture in its proper context, under His authority. So again, make the most of the cultural opportunities university offers. Enjoy them as gifts from God. Go to concerts; enjoy the museums and galleries. Why not aim to get to know one composer really well over the three years?

But if university offers cultural riches, it also offers spiritual riches. Most university cities are homes to churches where the gospel is faithfully taught. Make it a priority to find one out and get stuck in there. How do you judge what is a good one? I remember when I got to university nearly choosing a church because the music was so impressive. But a friend pointed out that good music wouldn't grow or change me over my 3 years, whereas faithful Bible teaching would. So after a struggle I chose a church where the music was less polished but the teaching more reliable. I am eternally grateful to my friend as one of the most thrilling things I remember about university was growing to love the Scriptures as I saw Christ there [6].

When you've found a church, resist the temptation to church-hop – you'll never find a perfect one. Join a small group; find a place to serve with your gifts. Don't just hang around with students but get to know the diversity of God's people. The benefits will be huge. In one particularly hard time in my final year, one of the older men in church offered to meet with me every week and it was a lifeline. Join the university Christian Union as well as you'll need the support of other Christians in your college or hall, even if the group is small. And they

will need yours. Join a prayer triplet. Get involved in evangelism on campus. Again, I remember one of my highlights at university being the big mission in my final year. Evangelism unites Christians like nothing else does. Get into the habit of praying for one or two non-Christian friends. Look out for opportunities to 'gossip the gospel' to people that you play and study with. I know of someone who played in an orchestra who would often try and talk to his desk-partner about Jesus.

Also on the subject of evangelism, whilst at university try to use your musical gifts for the gospel. Put on an evangelistic recital or concert. If you know other musical Christians, get together with them and form an orchestra. I had fun at university putting on evangelistic Bach cantatas with friends, but it doesn't have to be Bach. An evangelistic Jazz-event could be effective. Be imaginative!

And as you do all of this, pray that God would help you grow and use you to point others to Him. One way you can do this is to establish a regular time of reading the Bible and praying each day. Try 15 minutes in the morning, and it will soon grow. There are some excellent Bible Reading notes available [7]. This discipline has kept many a Christian close to the Lord over the years and it's especially vital for you if you are destined to be a lone musician!

Conclusion

Being a student can be a little bit like trying to find your way around a foreign city with a map that you can't read. With so many choices, even for the Christian it is possible to wander around aimlessly wondering what you should be doing and where you should be going. Can I plead with you not to waste your time at university. There's no need; for even if the map looks confusing at times, knowing which road to take is easier if you know your direction of travel. And you do – *to live is Christ...* (Phil 1:21). So start at university as you mean to go on, by putting allegiance to Him over every other allegiance. And the joy is that that does not rule out working hard at your studies. Rather the opposite; seek to let Christ redeem your music as you do it with freedom, purpose and diligence for Him. As you do, the

other little decisions will fall into place. And as you do, you will fulfil the greatest goal that God has for you, the goal that gives meaning to all that you will ever do and ever be – the goal of becoming more and more like Him.

Postscript – Top tips from Christian musicians

I asked three Christian musician friends to give me their three top tips for a new Christian music student starting at university. Here were their replies:

Matthew (Organist and Music teacher)

1. Get involved in a good Bible-teaching church if you can. Hearing the Word is more important than shunning cheesy worship music.
2. Make your daily quiet time a priority; pray about challenging situations before they happen.
3. Meet with other Christian musicians. Try to think of ways you can use your God-given gifts in His service.

Simon (Trombonist)

4. Decide that godliness is a key priority in your life at all times.
5. Know that whatever your performance is like, your standing in Christ is more wonderful.
6. Know that you don't have to be a slave to your instrument to master it or work hard at it.

Jane (Cellist)

7. Look around and take note of what other people's goals are; take note of them and then set your heart on heavenly goals. Don't get jealous when their earthly ways seem to bring more success and happiness than your heavenly ways – trust Jesus to have something wonderful in store for you.

8. Stay humble – we do not know how we could be tempted. It is easy to look down on the non-believer but we should remember that we were like that before God made us holy.

9. Keep around you a small group of people who will pray for you and ask you difficult questions and also encourage you when you are struggling. Be that person to someone else too. Bring **everything** to God in prayer.

Further Reading (NB – this list is not exhaustive and is limited to the issues specific to music.)

The Mind – General Christian worldview

Basic: Julian Hardyman – *Glory Days* (IVP 2006)

Intermediate: Francis Schaeffer – *Trilogy*, particularly *The God Who is There* (Crossway)

Advanced: Arthur F Holmes – *All Truth is God's Truth* (IVP 1979)

On forming a Biblical Christian worldview, I would also recommend the three books that form a set by Vaughan Roberts:

God's Big Picture (IVP 2003)

Life's Big Questions (IVP 2005)

God's Big Design (IVP 2006)

Specific application to music

Basic: Bill Edgar – *Taking Note of Music* (SPCK 1986)

Intermediate: Kenneth Myers – *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes* (Goodnews Publication 1989)

Advanced: Jeremy Begbie – *Voicing Creation's Praise* (Continuum 1991); *Music, Theology and Time* (CUP 2000)

The Emotions

Basic: Vaughan Roberts – *Battles Christians Face* (Authentic Lifestyle 2007)

Intermediate: Francis Schaeffer – *True Spirituality* (Tyndale House 1979)

Advanced: Ed Welch – *When People are Big and God is Small* (P + R Publishing Co 1997)

The Will

Basic: Vaughan Roberts – *Distinctives* (Authentic Lifestyle 2000)

Intermediate: R Kent Hughes - *Disciplines of a Godly Man/Woman* (Crossway 2006)

Advanced: J C Ryle – *Holiness* (Evangelical Press 1979)

[1] Cf 1 Corinthians 6:18 – ‘Flee from sexual immorality’. In the same way, Scripture says that we should flee situations of sexual sin. One root cause of a wrong use of sex, as music, is when it is idolised. But the Bible still maintains that though we must use it as God intends, sex itself is good, and to be celebrated in the right, God-ordained circumstances, namely heterosexual marriage. The same could also be said of music, namely that, so long as it is in its rightful, God-given, place, it should be celebrated and enjoyed.

[2] The approach of traditional academia towards music is often caricatured as one that emphasises and values the hard musical data above the actual experience of music (see *A Very Short Introduction to Music* by Nicholas Cook (OUP 2000)). In my experience, there is some truth in that. The Department in which I was an undergraduate was very academic in its approach, particularly in its study of music history. A danger of that is to think just enjoying music for its own sake is a lesser thing at best, and meaningless at worst. If Christ’s governance gives meaning to all, then we can affirm that musical meaning is found in engaging with *both* the musical data and the musical experience for He

created both the useful and the beautiful (see Genesis 2:9).

[3] I have been helped in much of my thinking on this section by a series of three talks on preaching given at the 2004 Evangelical Ministry Assembly by Dr Tim Keller.

[4] By Barry Green (Pan Books 1987).

[5] See Psalm 139:1-4; for more reading on the wonder of being known by God, see *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer, especially chapters 3, 6 and 8.

[6] Some of the books that made a particular impact on me as a student were recommended to me by my Bible study group leader at my church. They are all by Puritan writers – *Communion with God* and *The Glory of Christ* by John Owen, *The Bruised Reed* by Richard Sibbes, and a sermon by Jonathan Edwards entitled *The Excellency of Christ*. The three Puritan books are all in the *Puritan Paperback* series, published by *Banner of Truth*; the Edwards sermon can be found in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Book 1* (also *Banner of Truth*).

[7] Try *Search the Scriptures* edited by Alan M. Stibbs (IVP 1994).

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George Parsons is a freelance musician living in Sheffield. He teaches the piano and in 2007 started studying for a PhD exploring links between music, theology and aesthetics through the course of music history. He did his first BA degree in Music at The Queen's College Oxford where he was also an organ scholar and has previously spent a year studying the organ at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam. He remains active as an organ recitalist and accompanist and is a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists. Prior to becoming a student again, George worked as the Music Coordinator at Christchurch Fulwood in Sheffield, the church he is now happy to call his home.