

CFAMC DEVOTIONAL PAGE
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Why do you write music?

Simon Sinek has an excellent TED talk on leadership in the business world called, *How great leaders inspire action*. In this short speech, and his book *Start with Why*, Sinek makes some very compelling points about leadership and motivation. Sinek's big idea is that people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it.

Is this not true about music composition? If I want my music to have the greatest impact on people—to bring them healing, respite, and hope; to cause them to engage with important social justice issues; to bring them to the foot of the throne of mercy and grace; or simply be beautiful—than I need to be clear about why I am writing it. It's not sufficient to write great and compelling music, even if the audience never knows my motivation.

The funny thing is that once your music is out in the world there's nothing you can do about how people will interact with it or interpret it. You simply cannot control the actions and behaviors of other people no matter how well written your program notes. So why should you start with why? Because the state of your own heart matters. And it matters to God.

So, why *do* you write music?

Have you ever written a passage and thought, "Oh, this will impress them!" or, "I'll really be able to show off my ability if I do x or y."

Have you ever written a piece to win over a competition committee?

The Lord knows I'm guilty of the above and more. It should be obvious that the motivations behind these examples are selfish and vainglorious. As I examine my catalog of works and my motivations behind writing them I am again forced to ask myself, "why do I write music?"

As I was reading my Bible recently a passage from Psalm 149 gave me insight on what my motivation truly should be. The Psalm begins,

Hallelujah!

Sing to God a brand-new song,

praise him in the company of all who love him.

Let all Israel celebrate their Sovereign Creator,

Zion's children exult in their King.

Let them praise his name in dance;

strike up the band and make great music!

And why? Because God delights in his people. (The Message, Psalm 149:1–4)

Clearly the psalmist is encouraging a great musical celebration of God. He is promoting an outpouring of praise and thanksgiving rising to the heavens and to it well ("make great music"). As a musician and composer I have read this passage many times but I always stopped with verse 3. However, in verse 4 the psalmist provides the answer to *why* we should be writing music, "Because God delights in his people."

It's easy to stop with verse 3 due to the way a majority of translations handle the sentence structure of verse 4. Most begin verse 4 with the word "For." It can feel like verse 1–3 stand alone. In this passage the word is used as a conjunction between the verses that just occurred and the thought immediately following. Verse 4 *depends on* verses 1–3 in order to make sense. This is why I quoted from Eugene Peterson's wonderful translation/paraphrase. He ties the two thoughts together beautifully.

I have found it wonderful and freeing to write with this in mind. My anxieties about whether my piece is good enough, or if the composition committee will like it, evaporate. When my purpose for writing music is to respond to God's love for me I am free to write the music I am called and need to write.

In the end it's simply, really. Why should we be writing music? Because God loves us. Should there be any other reason?