

One of my hobbies is playing the piano. I am strictly an amateur, for though I have had some musical training, I have never had lessons in piano. What I know has been picked up throughout the years by blundering along. I try to create little melodies that make me feel good. I have always enjoyed it, even though what comes out isn't always beautiful music.

I am inspired by what the really great artists can produce with the piano (or any other instrument). The harmonica player in the group Blues Traveler, for instance, is absolutely amazing. The music seems to just flow from his heart, like he is able to translate what he feels directly into his song. Other musicians seem to be able to improvise on their instrument without restraint. And it sounds great!

My question is, Why can't I play the piano truly from my heart? Why can't I pour my feelings into my work? Well, I can, but it sounds like trash. Anyone can bang on the keys and "express" themselves, but the result doesn't sound beautiful. When I am playing sometimes, the mood strikes to change the rhythm or melody; I can almost hear it in my head but I just can't respond. It is beyond the limits of abilities, and I end up a little frustrated.

The key is the lack of training and discipline. I do not know the proper techniques of keyboard fingering, and I have not practiced the fundamentals (like scales) to develop the coordination in my fingers. My creations are kept within the narrow confines of my abilities.

How strange that the freedom to improvise beautifully depends on the constraints of discipline and training! We don't want to have to submit to the hard work required. If you have ever heard someone (perhaps yourself) play scales in different keys over and over again, you know how boring that can be. But unless we pay that price, we cannot express ourselves like we want to.

In the spiritual plane we find the same truth. God brought mankind along and gave him a set of rules for his development into what God wanted. These rules tend to produce the right output, even though the heart may not be right. But they should shape us on the inside as well. God wants us to begin to act right because it is a natural part of us, not because it is on our checklist of do's and don't's. In Jeremiah 31:31, God talks about how His law should be written on our hearts. God expects us to act now because we understand what Goodness is truly all about and have been transformed into His image.

So thinking about and living by God's laws are the training which enables us to become more like God. This discipline enables us to have the freedom to express the Goodness that God wants to see in us. It is not the freedom to do anything we want, but the ability to let God's love flow from us. The ability to improvise on the piano is not so much mechanically playing fast over a lot of notes, but producing something that is beautiful music. The discipline that we undergo can make our freedom beautifully pleasing to God. It allows us to "blossom" into the full dimensions of the servant of God that we can be.

We can make beautiful music with God. True, we will all hit a 'clinker' or two every now and then, but He will still be pleased at our attempt. Just as my parents endured hearing the same melody (with the same mistakes) over and over and over again without one word of discouragement to me, God will watch as we grow into His mature children. Let us perform for Him with all of our heart.