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Can You Hear the Music?

ELDER DIETER F. UCHTDORF

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My beloved brothers and sisters, my dear friends, Sister Uchtdorf and I are so grateful to be with you today. We bring you the love and greetings of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. You young people are the strength and future of the Church of Jesus Christ all around the earth. You are the Latter-day Saints who will be a blessing to the world. We love and admire you!

One year ago, almost exactly to the day, Harriet and I spoke to all the young adults of the Church from the Conference Center in Salt Lake City regarding your adventure through mortality. We will never forget that wonderful evening with you, and some of you might even remember our messages.¹

Harriet and I are amazed by your goodness, humility, and desire to embrace your membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and how you love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ and God's children. We are better people as a result.

I hope that you will feel the Holy Spirit ministering, uplifting, and instructing you as we meet together.

The Man at the Subway Station

On 12 January 2007, a man dressed in jeans and a T-shirt walked into a Washington, DC, subway station, pulled a violin from its case, and began to play.² He put his soul into the performance, sometimes pounding his bow against the strings, sometimes gently caressing them to bring out soft and sorrowful tones.

As he played, more than a thousand commuters passed through the train station on their way to work. They had busy days ahead of them: lists of things to do, worries, and troubles. Their minds were occupied with everyday trivial things—like where and what to eat for lunch, how their favorite sports team was doing, or whether anyone would notice their new glasses.

Some, undoubtedly, were wrestling with greater problems: a challenging health diagnosis, relationships that were unraveling, financial loss, or some other pressing anxiety.

In short, these people were people like you and me: unwrapping the gift of a new day, even the gift of a brand-new year, but consumed with the trivial and tragic, the petty and profound.

Did they notice the musician? Or was the man with the violin merely part of the impressionistic blur that shaded the all-too-familiar backdrop of their daily lives?

What these commuters did not know was that this musician was no ordinary violinist, he was playing no ordinary instrument, and he was playing no ordinary music.

The man's name was Joshua Bell—one of the most accomplished musicians in the world.

The violin he played was handcrafted in 1713 by Antonio Stradivari. Joshua Bell had purchased it a few years earlier for an estimated \$3.5 million.

And the music he played was some of the most challenging and beautiful ever composed.

Now, this whole experience in the subway station had been set up by a journalist from the *Washington Post* who was curious to know what would happen if a world-class musician gave an anonymous, virtuoso performance in the walkways of an ordinary subway station.

Would people recognize the sublime music played by a brilliant artist on an unparalleled instrument?

Or would they ignore him? Would they throw a coin or two into his open violin case and walk by?

Some people at the *Washington Post* worried that the experiment would cause a traffic-control nightmare at the station, with hundreds of people crowding around to listen.

Here is what happened.

Of the nearly 1,100 people who passed by Joshua Bell during his forty-five-minute performance, only “seven people stopped what they were doing to hang around and take in the performance, at least for a minute.”³

One person who had passed within four feet of Joshua Bell later could not recall that he had even seen a musician on his way to work. As it turns out, this man had been wearing earbuds, listening to a favorite rock song on his personal playlist. Ironically, the lyrics of the song were about failing to see the beauty right before your eyes.

The Music of the Spirit

The lesson this story teaches is profound. Not only does it tell us something important about life and living, it reveals important insight into our spiritual lives as well.

We sometimes get so caught up in the grind of everyday life that we fail to recognize the sublime voice of the Spirit and disregard the profound and beautiful message our loving Heavenly Father imparts to us through His messengers.

This experiment can prompt us to look inside our hearts and ask, “Can I hear the music of the Spirit?”

Can we hear the gentle call of our beloved Savior, who invites us to come and follow Him? Do we hear His voice?

Or is life too rushed? Too busy or burdened? Too filled with the thousand daily things that demand our attention?⁴

My beloved brothers and sisters, my dear friends, I testify that our loving Father in Heaven is reaching out to you. The Savior is speaking to you: “Come, follow me.”⁵

In every hour of the day and throughout the night, He communicates through the divine music of the Spirit.

Can you hear it?

How Can You Hear the Spirit?

You might ask, “How can I recognize the voice of God? How do I distinguish it from the other thoughts and feelings I have? And what can I do to attune my ears to hear it?”

Answering these questions is the quest of a lifetime. And while the process is similar for all, we each individually must travel our own path to find the answers. For some, hearing God’s voice seems intuitive and obvious. Some seem to be born with a testimony of the gospel and a sensitivity to spiritual things. For others, belief comes slowly, and the process may feel difficult or frustrating. They spend years or even decades striving to feel the Spirit. They want to have a testimony, but they can’t honestly say that they do.

In my case, I have believed ever since I was a young boy, living in a small branch of the Church in Zwickau, East Germany. Our chapel had a beautiful stained glass window depicting the Prophet Joseph Smith kneeling in the Sacred Grove. As I sat in the chapel and gazed at that scene, even as a young boy, I believed.

This belief has been a blessing to me throughout my life.

Now, I acknowledge that my experience may not be like yours. But whether the gift of faith comes early or late, all of us must seek and nurture that gift. We all live in a world full of distractions, away from the spiritual and the eternal. This part of the test of mortality is given to us by Heavenly Father. We are here to learn how to find God, to recognize and follow His voice, even amid the clamor and noise of the world. Each of us is responsible for our own learning.

The scriptures are filled with guidance, tools, and counsel about how to recognize the voice of the Spirit. A good place to start is in the Doctrine and Covenants, where many revelations given to Joseph Smith and the early Saints were about this very topic. As the heavens opened in the latter days, it became clear that God was willing to reveal truth to His children as He had in days of old. Joseph and his associates naturally had questions about how to receive revelation, how to recognize the promptings of the Spirit, and how to know that they are from heaven and not from any other source—just as you and I have these questions today.

So, in the Doctrine and Covenants we are taught that we “must study it out in [our] mind” and then “ask . . . if it be right.”⁶

We are told, “Put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good.”⁷

We learn that “the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith.”⁸

And we are promised, “He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day.”⁹

The Fine Print

There is, however, some fine print we need to be aware of.

First, this light will come in God’s time, not ours.

Second, it will come in God’s way—a way we might not expect or even want.

Third, it comes as we believe.

Now some of you might say, “In order to have greater belief in God, I have to believe? But that is exactly my problem. What if I can’t believe?”

The answer is: Then hope. And desire to believe. That is enough to start.

To desire to believe does not mean to pretend. It means to open your heart to the possibility of spiritual things, to lay aside skepticism and cynicism.

If you can simply want to believe, that can start the seed of faith growing within your heart.¹⁰

Eventually that seed will grow until you can begin to believe. Those first glimpses of belief lead to faith. And your faith will grow stronger day by day until it shines bright within you. Then you will truly be able to “ask in faith, nothing wavering.”¹¹

This is the kind of faith that has the power to unlock the mysteries of heaven and fill your heart with the wondrous knowledge and sublime testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We Are Seekers

Please understand that this is not a process of once and done.

It is not a process of minutes or hours. It may not be a process of months or even years.

It is the process of a lifetime.

We are seekers, you and I.

We are light gatherers.

We are on this lifelong mission—to gather light and bear it to the world—that will lead us through the joys and trials of life.

So don’t ever stop seeking. Jesus promised that if we seek, we shall find. If we knock, it will be opened. If we listen, we will hear. For the scripture says, “Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that

knocketh it shall be opened.”¹² Hold on to that promise. Even if it takes your entire lives to find the precious light and truth you seek, it will be well worth the effort.

The Problem of Now

Of course, in our age of instant answers, it is not easy to be patient. We sometimes get frustrated when our search for truth takes longer than we had hoped. Information on a wide variety of subjects is now so easily accessible that waiting seems like an unnecessary nuisance. If sending or receiving a message takes any longer than a second or two, we decide something must be broken.

If anyone has a question? No problem. You can get answers—thousands of them—almost instantaneously. If you want to connect with someone, you can do it in seconds—no matter how far away the person may be.

Do you want to watch a video of baby ducks crossing a busy street? You can see that. Do you want a back scratcher in the shape of a moose antler? You can have it on your doorstep within a day or two. Do you want a wall-mounted, motion-activated, lifelike plastic fish that sings “Don’t Worry, Be Happy”? You can find it, and if you act now you may even get free shipping.

But if you want something of true and lasting value, something of eternal significance, something that connects the now with the eternities, patience and diligence are required.

I don’t know why the answers to our prayers are delayed at times. Perhaps the Lord wants us to prove to Him—or to ourselves—just how sincerely we want the truth. Maybe the effort He requires is how we learn to value the truth. Maybe that is how we prepare ourselves to receive and accept the truth. Or simply, maybe it is God’s way of helping us to learn how to hear the music.

But, my dear friends, one thing I do know: the process of communication between mortals and heaven is not broken. It is real. It is available to you and me!

If we attune our hearts, eyes, and ears to recognize the Spirit—if we strive to walk in the way of light—we will surely find what we seek. We will surely learn how to hear the music!

However, we must understand that God is not a vending machine. Just because we put a prayer request into the slot, that does not mean an answer will appear immediately at our feet.

No, communing with the Infinite, communing with the Divine, takes time. And it takes commitment.

Casual prayers do not yield sublime answers.

In this life it is our great opportunity to struggle, to fight, and, yes, to fail occasionally in our pursuit of the divine. It is all part of the process designed to refine our character and perfect our spirits.

When we strive with heart and mind to follow the Savior and incorporate His teachings into our daily lives, we receive favor from heaven. The Lord has promised that if we walk uprightly, “search diligently, pray always, and be believing, . . . all things shall work together for [our] good.”¹³

What a precious promise.

King Benjamin urged us to “consider . . . the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness.”¹⁴

So the process of learning to hear the voice of the Spirit not only refines us and allows us to enjoy the wondrous music of the Spirit, but it also blesses us, directs our steps, and brings us the favor and guidance of heaven.



Joshua Bell—one of the most accomplished musicians in the world.

But What If We Feel Unworthy?

I would like to leave one final thought with you today. Some of you may be thinking, “The gospel might work fine for other people. But not for me. I have made mistakes. Lots of them. Sometimes I make the same mistakes over and over. I try to repent, but it doesn’t take. I feel ashamed and guilty. I am not like others in my family or in my ward.”

To all who feel defective in some way, may I tell you a secret?

We are all defective. You. Me. Everyone.

“But,” you say, “I am a special case. I think I make too many mistakes, too often.”

Yes, you are mortal. And mortals fall short. Time and again.

Mistakes are events on the timeline of your life. But they don’t define your life.

They don’t define you as a person or as a child of God. However, what you do about your mistakes by using the gifts given to us by Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ will go a long way in defining the person you will yet become.

You can allow “godly sorrow”¹⁵ for your sins to lead you to *change* for the better—to help you become the men and women God designed you to become.

We call this change *repentance*. However, dwelling too much on your mistakes leads to shame, which discourages you from striving to improve.

True repentance is not about shame. It is about becoming.

My dear friends, each day you have a choice—to give up or to carry on.

Disciples of Christ—followers of Christ—carry on.

They believe.

They seek the light.

They trust God.

They love as He loved.

They strive to do as He taught.

The scriptures teach, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”¹⁶

Even though you may pray imperfectly and make mistakes, God will not find fault with you. He will give generously.

Your mistakes have not disqualified you from heaven’s reach.

If God answered the prayers only of the perfectly obedient, He would have to shut down heaven’s entire prayer-answering department.

God reaches out to us even when we are struggling, when we are failing. In fact, we might say that He reaches out to us *especially* when we are struggling and failing.

Being a disciple or follower of Christ does not mean we live perfectly. It means we stay on the path. We rise when we stumble. We hold on to the light we are given, even when we feel darkness gathering around us.

We are imperfect.

But we are striving.

As disciples of Christ, we are striving to believe. Striving to love. Striving to trust. We are striving to align our lives with the teachings of Christ. We are in the process of refining our spirits and improving our daily lives.

This is one of the great reasons why we wanted so desperately to come to this earth to learn the lessons of failing and of feeling the blessings, peace, and refining influence of repentance and the miracle of forgiveness.

I am not suggesting that we shrug off or glory in our sins. That would not be the Lord’s way; it would be contrary to the plan of salvation. What I am saying is that our mistakes don’t disqualify us from God’s grace and forgiveness. They do not block us from repentance or the Savior’s purifying Atonement. Rather, they are the reason why He—the Savior, our Redeemer, the Messiah—accomplished that atoning sacrifice for you and me.

Even when—perhaps especially when—we feel inadequate, weak, or of little worth, we can still hear the sublime heavenly music. We can still learn to hear the voice of the Spirit.

By the healing of our imperfections, our Lord and Savior shows His perfect love for us in an even grander way. The greater our desire for true repentance, the greater our gratitude for His atoning sacrifice.¹⁷

The Music of Heaven

I hope you have been listening to the voice of the Spirit today. I hope that the Spirit has impressed upon your heart direction and resolve. And I hope you will do at least five things:

First, will you consider the story of the musician in the subway and ask yourself, “Can I hear the music of the Spirit?”

Second, will you believe? If you can’t muster the faith to believe, then desire to believe. God will meet you there. And He will add to the light you already possess until, one day, you feel His glorious presence within your heart as a beacon of light and a source of divine peace.

Third, will you trust God? Will you begin to have a little patience? Spiritual maturity does not come in an instant. Please draw near to God, and God will draw near to you.¹⁸

Fourth, will you remember that as you walk the path of following Jesus, the very process of striving to follow Him will refine and develop you? In addition, this striving will bestow upon you important direction and divine favor and blessings.

Fifth, will you keep trying? Don't ever give up. You are going to make mistakes in this life. Please know that the Savior's love for you is greater than any of your mistakes.

My beloved brothers and sisters, my dear friends, I bless you with hope. With belief. With love. With a desire to walk in the redeeming and glorifying light of Jesus Christ. He is real. His love and sacrifice are real. Far more than the sublime music in that Washington subway station, God's glorious light, love, and power are all around you, always. You need only to seek Him.

I promise you that God will guide your steps. Jesus Christ will go before you. He will send His angels to surround you and "bear you up."¹⁹ He will cause all things to work together for your good.

My dear friends, open your hearts, minds, and souls to hear the wondrous music of the Spirit, and you will surely rejoice in God's goodness and grace. Of this I testify and leave you my apostolic blessing for this new year and always, in the sacred name of our Master. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. **RE**

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Notes

1. See Harriet R. Uchtdorf, "You Are Leaders," and Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "The Adventure of Mortality," Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults, Salt Lake City, 14 January 2018.

2. Story taken from Gene Weingarten, "Pearls Before Breakfast: Can One of the Nation's Great Musicians Cut Through the Fog of a D.C. Rush Hour? Let's Find Out," *Washington Post*, 8 April 2007, [washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/pearls-before-breakfast-can-one-of-the-nations-great-musicians-cut-through-the-fog-of-a-dc-rush-hour-lets-find-out/2014/09/23/8a6d46da-4331-11e4-b47c-f5889e061e5f_story.html?utm_term=.7a98ba98266c](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/pearls-before-breakfast-can-one-of-the-nations-great-musicians-cut-through-the-fog-of-a-dc-rush-hour-lets-find-out/2014/09/23/8a6d46da-4331-11e4-b47c-f5889e061e5f_story.html?utm_term=.7a98ba98266c). This story won a Pulitzer Prize for feature writing in 2008.

3. Weingarten, "Pearls Before Breakfast."

4. This is a common mortal failing. Jesus even chided His apostles, saying, "Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?" (Mark 8:18).

5. Luke 18:22.

6. Doctrine and Covenants 9:8.

7. Doctrine and Covenants 11:12.

8. Doctrine and Covenants 42:14.

9. Doctrine and Covenants 50:24.

10. In his wonderful sermon on faith, Alma urged: "Arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than *desire to believe*, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words. Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me" (Alma 32:27–28; emphasis added).

11. James 1:6.

12. Luke 11:10.

13. Doctrine and Covenants 90:24.

14. Mosiah 2:41.

15. 2 Corinthians 7:10.

16. James 1:5 New International Version.

17. The Savior taught this lesson to Simon, one of the Pharisees, who complained that Jesus had allowed a sinful woman to anoint His feet with ointment and wipe them with her hair as she wept. Simon felt that if Jesus truly were inspired, He would know this woman was a sinner and would have forbidden her from touching Him.

But Jesus responded by saying: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" (Luke 7:41–42).

Of course, Simon said that the debtor who owed the most would love the most.

Jesus agreed and said of the woman, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (Luke 7:47; see Luke 7:36–50).

18. See James 4:8.

19. Doctrine and Covenants 84:88.