

Hearing His Voice

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In a world with so many competing voices, our Heavenly Father has made it possible for us to hear and follow His.

Earlier this morning, my wife's brother gave her a note that she had written to her mother many years ago. At the time, Sister Homer was just a little girl. In part, her note read, "Dear Mother, I am sorry I did not bear my testimony today—but I love you." As we went to lunch, I thought that was an interesting thing. So I sat down, and I wrote a note that said, "Dear President Nelson, I am sorry I did not give my talk today—but I love you." Somehow that did not feel right. So here we are, and I am happy to add my words to those that have been spoken in this session today.

Many years ago, I traveled on a small plane with a newly certified pilot at the controls. At the end of our flight, we were cleared to land. But as we neared the ground, I heard an alarm in the cockpit warn the pilot to "pull up." The pilot looked to the more experienced copilot, who pointed in a downward direction, away from the runway, and said, "Now!"

Our plane rapidly moved to the left and down, then climbed back to an appropriate altitude, reentered the landing pattern, and arrived safely at our destination. We later learned that another aircraft had been cleared for takeoff. Had we followed the instructions of the alarm, we would have veered into, rather than away from, the oncoming plane. This experience taught me two important lessons: First, at critical moments in our lives, we will hear multiple voices competing for our attention. And second, it is vital that we listen to the right ones.

Competing Voices

We live in a world with many voices seeking our attention. With all the breaking news, tweets, blogs, podcasts, and compelling advice from Alexa, Siri, and others, we can find it difficult to know which voices to trust. Sometimes we crowdsource guidance in our lives, thinking the majority will provide the best source of truth. Other times we "halt ... between two opinions,"¹ choosing to be "neither cold nor hot."² Still other times we follow what is convenient, focus on a single voice or issue to guide us, or rely exclusively upon our own ability to think.

While each of these approaches can be helpful, experience teaches that they are not always reliable. What is popular is not always what is best. Halting between two opinions brings no direction. Convenience rarely leads to things that matter. Fixation on a single voice or issue can impair our ability to see. And relying solely upon our own thinking can lead us into a hyperintellectual stupor of thought. If we are not careful, the wrong voices can draw us away from the gospel center to places where faith is difficult to sustain, and we find little more than emptiness, bitterness, and dissatisfaction.

Listening to the Wrong Voice

Let me demonstrate what I mean by using an analogy and a scriptural example. Mountain climbers commonly refer to altitudes above 8,000 meters as the “death zone” because at those heights there is not enough oxygen to sustain life. There is a spiritual equivalent to the death zone. If we spend too much time in faithless places, seemingly well-intended voices deprive us of the spiritual oxygen we need.

In the Book of Mormon, we read of Korihor, who had such an experience. He enjoyed great popularity because his teachings were “pleasing [to] the carnal mind.”³ He said that parents and prophets teach foolish traditions designed to limit freedom and perpetuate ignorance.⁴ He argued that people should be free to do whatever they choose because commandments are nothing more than conveniently contrived restrictions.⁵ To him, belief in the Atonement of Jesus Christ was “the effect of a frenzied mind,” created by belief in a being who could not exist because He could not be seen.⁶

Korihor created so much unrest that he was brought before the chief judge and the high priest. There, he rose “up in great swelling words,” criticizing the leaders and demanding a sign. A sign was given. He was struck so that he could not speak. Korihor then realized he had been deceived, and thinking of precious truths he had abandoned, he lamented, “I always knew.”⁷

Korihor then begged for food until he was trampled to death by a group of Zoramites.⁸ The final verse in his story contains this sober reflection: “And thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell.”⁹

The Right Voice

Because our Heavenly Father wants better for us, He makes it possible for us to hear His voice. Most often, we hear Him through impressions given by the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead. He witnesses of the Father and the Son,¹⁰ was sent to “teach [us] all things,”¹¹ and will “show unto [us] all things what [we] should do.”¹²

The Spirit speaks to different people in different ways, and He may speak to the same person in different ways at different times. As a result, learning the many ways He speaks to us is a lifelong quest. Sometimes, He speaks to our “mind and in [our] heart”¹³ in a voice that is small yet powerful, piercing “them that ... hear to the center.”¹⁴ Other times His impressions “occupy [our] mind[s]” or “press ... upon [our] feelings.”¹⁵ Other times our bosom will “burn within [us].”¹⁶ Still other times He fills our souls with joy, enlightens our minds,¹⁷ or speaks peace to our troubled hearts.¹⁸

Finding His Voice

We will find our Father’s voice in many places. We will find it when we pray, study the scriptures, attend church, engage in faithful discussions, or go to the temple. Surely, we will find it in conference this very weekend.

Today we sustained 15 men as prophets, seers, and revelators. Their spirituality and experience give them a unique perspective that we desperately need. Their messages are easy to find and spoken with absolute clarity. They tell us what God wants us to know, whether it is popular or not.¹⁹

Seeking His voice in any one of these places is good, but seeking it in many of them is even better. And when we hear it, we need to follow the direction that is given. The Apostle James said, “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.”²⁰ And President Thomas S. Monson once taught: “We watch. We wait. We listen for that still, small voice. When it speaks, wise men and women obey.”²¹

When Direction Is Slow to Come

Early in my professional life, Sister Homer and I were asked to accept a change in job assignment. At the time, it seemed to us a *huge* decision. We studied, we fasted, and we prayed, but an answer was slow to come. Eventually, we made a decision and pressed forward. As we did, we felt settled and soon learned that it was one of the best decisions we had ever made.

As a result, we have learned that answers are sometimes slow to come. This can be because it is not the right time, because an answer is not needed, or because God trusts us to make the decision ourselves. Elder Richard G. Scott once taught that we should be grateful for such times and made this promise: “When you are living worthily and your choice is consistent with the Savior’s teachings and you need to act, proceed with trust. ... God will not let you proceed too far without a warning impression if you have made the wrong decision.”²²

We Must Choose

And so, we need to decide which among all the different voices we will obey. Will we follow the unreliable voices advocated by the world, or will we do the work required to allow our Father’s voice to guide us in our decisions and protect us from danger? The more diligently we seek His voice, the easier it becomes to hear. It is not that His voice gets louder but that our ability to hear it has increased. The Savior has promised that if we “hearken unto [His] precepts, and lend an ear unto [His] counsel,” He “will give [us] more.”²³ I testify that this promise is true—for each of us.

Nearly a year ago, we lost my older brother in a tragic automobile accident. John’s early years were full of promise and accomplishment. But as he grew older, a broken body and uncooperative mind made life very difficult. While the healing he hoped for didn’t come in this life, John nonetheless held to his faith, determined to endure, as best he could, to the end.

Now, I know that John was not perfect, but I have wondered what it was that gave him such endurance. Many voices invited him into the cynical fringe, but he chose not to go. Instead, he did his best to anchor his life at the gospel center. He lived his life there because he knew he would find the voice of his Master there; he lived his life there because he knew it was there that he would be taught.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, in a world with so many competing voices, I testify that our Heavenly Father has made it possible for us to hear and follow His. If we are diligent, He and His Son will give us the direction we seek, the strength we need, and the happiness we all desire. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

