

Listening in Concert

The Beauty of a Concert

What's so appealing about a concert? Almost everyone's been to one at some point or another. Anyone who's ever heard the Hallelujah chorus from Handel's Messiah seems to have that one-word tune indelibly imprinted in their brain. There's a reason well-orchestrated music can be so memorable. Let's break down the contributing elements in a concert.

In classical music, **a concert performance is comprised of a *symphony***, the musical composition; **an *orchestra***, the musicians playing particular instruments; **a *conductor***, the leader of the musicians as they perform; **and an *audience***.

To summarize, there are four **required elements** to a classical concert: **music, musicians, conductor and audience**. Let's keep this in mind as we embark on today's topic, which is *Listening in Concert*.

Listening in Concert in the Natural World

Listening in concert is a phenomenon found across the animal kingdom, where groups of creatures communicate, respond, and coordinate their actions through sound, movement, or other signals. This **collective listening is essential** for survival, cooperation, and social bonding.

The natural world is full of *symphonies*—some audible, some silent—where creatures listen and respond to each other in ways that sustain life and foster cooperation.

Birds exhibit remarkable abilities to *listen and respond to each other in groups*, relying on vocalizations, visual cues, and even body language. In mixed-species flocks, birds communicate about food sources and alert each other to threats. Their constant twittering is a form of *concerted listening*.

I have been able to observe this at our backyard bird feeder. The chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches that congregate there are *constantly listening to each other*. Sometimes when I put new seed in the feeder, it seems to take a while before the birds discover it; but once the first one shows up, others invariably follow. This same *attentiveness to neighbors enables rapid response* to warnings. When one bird sounds the alarm, all the others move out, even if the sentinel was of a different species.

Another astonishing example from the avian world is *a mesmerizing aerial display* called a *murmuration*, with thousands of starlings *moving in synchrony*. *Each bird listens and responds to the movements of its nearest neighbors*, resulting in fluid, coordinated patterns that help evade predators. This behavior relies on rapid auditory and visual communication within the flock.

Listening in the Life of a Believer

Over the course of their spiritual lives, believers can grow in their ability to listen. We start by learning how to [listen as individuals](#), but as we partner with God we can also learn to [listen as a group](#).

As an [individual](#) before God, I am actively interested in learning to personally [listen to Him](#) — the conductor — in my walk. I want to be sensitive and ready to respond to that still, small voice within, just me and Him.

*As a [member of the one body](#), however, I want to also be aware of and [listen to the other members](#) — my fellow musicians, if you will. I want to build an internal conviction that God doesn't just talk to me; He also talks to my fellow believers in the body of Christ. I should be looking to see Him work, not only in me individually, but also in and among us, collectively. [When we as individuals also listen collectively to discern together the movement of the spirit, we are *listening in concert*.](#)*

Listening in Concert in the One Body

Concerted listening works differently for creatures than it does for man. In the animal kingdom, the conductor of the orchestra, so to speak, is instinct. Not having free will, creatures are programmed to listen to the natural impulses that God has mapped within them. Since these internal indicators rarely go awry, in optimal circumstances animals are generally very successful in their endeavors.

Humans, on the other hand, must exert a concerted effort to develop these life-navigational skills. As we choose by free will to partner with our heavenly Father, we come to realize that “It’s not just about me — it’s about Him and about my neighbor.” We listen to Him in concert with our fellow believers, following the gentle prompting of the spirit of God within.

Ephesians 4 lays the foundation for the sevenfold unity of the spirit.

Ephesians 4:3-6:

eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—

one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Our diversity becomes a strength when we first recognize our *unity*.
We see ourselves, not as some isolated unit, but as part of a living, growing organism, the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:15,16:

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Please turn to 1 Corinthians 12. No one part is designed to function independently of the others; all are to synchronize harmoniously in conjunction with the head.

1 Corinthians 12:18-21:

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

If all were a single member, where would the body be?

As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

When we say, "I have no need of you", we've stopped listening. When we realize "I very much do need you", we are on our way to success and concerted communication before God.

To practically illustrate the [divinely orchestrated benefits of listening in concert](#), we'll review what God was able to do in the ministries of Peter and Paul on two separate occasions.

Divinely Orchestrated Listening: Peter and Cornelius

We will first consider the record of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10. Rather than reading the verses, I will offer a summary.

Step One: An angel talks to Cornelius, and he acts.

Cornelius, a Roman centurion in Caesarea, is devout, generous, and prayerful. One afternoon, he receives a vision from an angel who tells him that his prayers and charity have been noticed by God. The angel instructs Cornelius to send for Simon Peter, who is staying in Joppa with Simon the tanner. *He doesn't tell him why.* Cornelius immediately obeys, sending trusted men to find Peter.

Step Two: Peter has a vision, and he reflects.

The next day, as Cornelius' messengers approach, Peter retires to the rooftop to pray and becomes hungry and wants something to eat. He sees a vision of a sheet descending from heaven, filled with animals considered "unclean" by Jewish law. A voice tells him to eat, but Peter refuses, citing the law. The voice responds, "What God has made clean, do not call common." This vision repeats three times, leaving Peter puzzled about its meaning. *He doesn't yet know why he saw it.*

Step Three: The two meet and agree to proceed.

As Peter ponders the vision, Cornelius' men arrive. The Spirit tells Peter to go with them without hesitation. Peter tells them, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" They tell him that Cornelius [v.22] "was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to **hear what you have to say.**" *Recognizing that they are acting on God's instructions,* he invites them in to be his guests, and the next day travels to Cornelius' house.

Step Four: The two begin to realize what God is orchestrating.

There, he finds that Cornelius is expecting them and has gathered his family and close friends. [vs. 28,29] And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but **God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.** (*which is more than he knew the day before*) So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.” (*Note that God still hasn't yet revealed to him the reason for having them send for him.*)

Cornelius then recounts his vision and expresses eagerness to hear Peter’s message, saying [v.33] “Now therefore **we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.**” (*By this point, Cornelius is fully focused on what God would have him learn in this encounter.*)

Step Five: All parties involved fully engage on the path God has set.

Peter realizes the meaning of his vision: [v.34] God shows no partiality, and anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to Him. Peter shares the story of Jesus—His ministry, death, and resurrection—and proclaims that forgiveness of sins is available to everyone who believes in Jesus.

While Peter is speaking, **the holy spirit comes upon all who are listening**, including the Gentiles. **Hearing them speak in tongues and extol God**, the Jewish believers with Peter are amazed that the holy spirit is given to Gentiles as well. This marks the historic moment where Gentiles are welcomed into the faith.

Listening to God and Listening to Each Other

Listening in concert doesn't just involve listening to God; it also requires listening to each other. In the record of Peter and Cornelius, we see that God specifically set things up in such a way that Peter and Cornelius would each have to learn from the other in order to discover the next steps in their God-ordained encounter. Clearly, God not only wanted them to connect with Him; He also wanted them to connect with each other.

God knows that being human, we need each other. The working of the spirit of God within us is designed to knit us together in love. Our godly, loving relationships with one another help to strengthen us in the faith and keep us moving forward with God together. When we afford one another respect and hear each other from the heart, God is able to bring about great things for us collectively.

Divinely Orchestrated Listening: Barnabas and Saul

We will next consider Barnabas and Saul in Acts 13 and 14. I will again offer a summary instead of reading the record through.

Step One: Devoting time to God, leaders realize their next mission.

In the church at Antioch, prophets and teachers—including Barnabas and Saul—were worshiping and fasting. God by way of the holy spirit directed them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a special mission. After prayer and fasting, the church laid hands on them and sent them out.

Acts 13:1-3:

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger [which means, “the black”, probably indicating he was from Africa], Lucius of Cyrene [a Roman colony on the coast of Libya, also in Africa], Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch [who, by the way, was the one who beheaded John the Baptist], and Saul.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Step Two: Sent out by the church, the commissioned ones preach.

Barnabas and Saul, assisted by John Mark, traveled to Cyprus. In Paphos, they encountered a false prophet named Bar-Jesus (Elymas), who opposed their message before the proconsul Sergius Paulus. Paul, filled with the holy spirit, rebuked Elymas, causing him to become blind. Witnessing this, Sergius Paulus believed in the Lord.

Step Three: Led by the spirit, they arrive where they will be heard.

Paul and Barnabas moved on to Antioch in Pisidia. In the synagogue, Paul delivered a powerful sermon recounting Israel’s history and proclaiming Jesus as the promised Savior. He emphasized Jesus’ resurrection and the forgiveness of sins through faith in Him.

- Many Jews and Gentile converts were receptive, but others grew jealous and opposed them.
- Paul and Barnabas declared their mission to the Gentiles, quoting Isaiah: *“I have made you a light for the Gentiles.”*
- The gospel spread widely, but persecution arose, and they were expelled from the region. They shook the dust off their feet and went to Iconium.

Step Four: Undaunted by persecution, they return to confirm.

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas preached boldly, and many Jews and Greeks believed. However, opposition stirred division, and a plot to stone them forced them to flee to Lystra and Derbe.

In Lystra, Paul healed a man crippled from birth. The crowd, amazed, thought Paul and Barnabas were gods—Hermes and Zeus—and tried to offer sacrifices. The apostles tore their clothes and urged them to turn to the living God, the Creator of all things.

Jews from Antioch and Iconium incited the crowd, and Paul was stoned and left for dead. But he survived, and the next day continued to Derbe with Barnabas. After making many disciples, they revisited the cities to strengthen believers, teaching that *“through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”* They appointed elders in every church with prayer and fasting.

Step Five: Successful, they rehearse before all what God has done.

Acts 14:27:

And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Divinely Orchestrated Listening: Inputs and Outcomes

The commissioning and subsequent missionary journey of Barnabas and Saul offers several lessons about inputs and outcomes when the Church engages in collective listening.

First, the musicians in the orchestra focused on the conductor (God).

Just as the conductor shows the way with regard to timing, interpretation and coordination of the music, the leaders in the Church “learned the score” about their next moves by consulting the One in charge before they even started. Smart cookies!

Second, the performing musicians followed the conductor’s cues on the ground, in real time.

Nothing is recorded about God’s directions as to where to go, who to address and when to move on; but we see the results in terms of the response. Those who were destined to eternal life believed.

Third, listening and adjusting kept them fluid and responsive in difficult circumstances.

God hasn't promised that everything will always go flawlessly. When opposition inevitably occurs, how do we buoy back up to the top? By identifying our next move, by listening to Him!

Fourth, the performance isn't over until the recounting of it is finished.

When God sends us on a mission, He expects us to glorify Him upon its accomplishment. We listen, engage and execute, and return to glorify the Originator.

Listening in Concert: Thankfulness to God

Romans reminds us of what all this is leading up to.

Romans 15:5:

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen and amen!