



Worthy Music, Worthy Thoughts

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When I was a boy, we lived in a home surrounded by an orchard. There never seemed to be enough water for the trees. The ditches, always freshly plowed in the spring, would soon fill with weeds. One day, in charge of the irrigation turn, I found myself in trouble. As the water moved down the rows choked with weeds, it would flood in every direction. I worked in the puddles trying to build up the bank. As



soon as I had one break patched up, there would be another. A neighbor came through the orchard. He watched for a moment, and then with a few vigorous strokes of the shovel, he cleared the ditch and allowed the water to course through the channel he had made. He said, “If you want the water to stay in its course, you’ll have to make a place for it to go.”

I have come to know that thoughts, like water, will stay on course if we make a place for them to go. Otherwise, our thoughts follow the course of least resistance, always seeking the lower levels. Probably the greatest challenge and the most difficult thing you will face in mortal life is to learn to control your thoughts. In the Bible it says, as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Those who can control their thoughts have conquered themselves.

The Mind Is like a Stage

As you learn to control your thoughts, you can overcome habits, even degrading personal habits. You can gain courage, conquer fear, and have a happy life. I had been told a hundred times or more as I grew up



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that thoughts must be controlled, but no one told me how. I've thought about this over the years and have decided that the mind is like a stage. During every waking moment the curtain is up. There is always some act being performed on that stage. It may be a comedy, a tragedy, interesting or dull, good or bad; but always there is some act playing on the stage of your mind.

Have you noticed that shady little thoughts may creep in from the wings and attract your attention in the middle of almost

any performance and without any real intent on your part? These delinquent thoughts will try to upstage everybody. If you permit them to go on, all thoughts of any virtue will leave the stage. You will be left, because you consented to it, to the influence of unrighteous thoughts. If you yield to them, they will enact for you on the stage of your mind anything to the limits of your toleration. They may enact themes of bitterness, jealousy, or hatred. They may be vulgar, immoral, even depraved. When they have the stage, if you let them, they will devise the most clever persuasions to hold your attention. They can make it

interesting all right, even convince you that they are innocent, for they are but thoughts. What do you do at a time like that, when the stage of your mind is commandeered by the imps of unclean thinking, whether they be the gray ones that seem almost clean or the filthy ones that leave no room for doubt? If you can fill your mind with clean and constructive thoughts, then there will be no room for these persistent imps, and they will leave.

How Do You Control Your Thoughts?

I realize that in today's world it's often difficult to keep your mind filled with worthy thoughts. This takes careful control. However, it can be done when you make a safe place for your thoughts to go. I've found a way to make such a place, and I'd like to share it



with you. It has to do with music—worthy music. A wise man once said, “Music is one of the most forceful instruments for governing the mind.” Whether it governs in a



positive way or a negative way is determined by what it brings onto the stage of your mind. If you can say that a song is spiritually inspiring

or that it urges you to see yourself in a more noble perspective, the music is worthwhile. If it merely entertains or lifts your spirits, then it also has a useful place. But if it makes you want to respond in a carnal, sensual way or to consider unrighteous desires, then that music should be avoided. It is not worthy.

There have always been those who take the beautiful things and corrupt them. It’s happened with nature; it’s happened with literature, drama, art; and it certainly has happened with music. For centuries it has been obvious that when the wrong kind of

words are set to appealing music, songs can lead men astray. And music itself, by the way it is played, by its beat, by its intensity, can dull the spiritual sensitivity.

We are living at a time when society is undergoing a subtle, but powerful, change. It is becoming more and more permissive in what it will accept in its entertainment. As a result, much of the music being performed by popular entertainers today seems to be more intended to agitate than to pacify, more to excite than to calm. Some musicians appear to openly promote unrighteous thoughts and action.

Young people, you cannot afford to fill your minds with the unworthy music of our day. It is not harmless. It can

welcome onto the stage of your mind unworthy thoughts and set a tempo to which they dance and to which you may act. You degrade yourself when you identify with those things that at times surround extremes in music—the shabbiness, the irreverence, the immorality, the addictions. Such music is not worthy of you.

Be selective in what you listen to and produce. It becomes part of you. It controls your thoughts and influences the lives of others as well. I would recommend that you go through your music and throw away that which promotes degrading thoughts. Such music ought not to belong

to young people concerned with spiritual development.

I don’t mean by this that all of today’s music produces unworthy thoughts. There is music today that builds understanding of people; music that inspires courage; music that awakens feelings of spirituality, reverence, happiness, and awareness of beauty.

Choose Inspiring Music

The Lord has said, “For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be

answered with a blessing upon their heads” (D&C 25:12). The First Presidency of the Church, commenting on the influence of music in our lives, has said: “Through music, man’s ability to express himself extends beyond the limits of the spoken language in both subtlety and power. Music can be used to exalt and inspire or to carry messages of degradation and destruction. It is therefore important that as Latter-day Saints we at all times apply the principles of the gospel and seek the guidance of the Spirit in selecting the music with which we surround ourselves.”¹¹

Let me say to you young leaders, pay careful attention to the music you plan for your activities. Consult with your advisers as selections are made. You need the benefit of



their wisdom,
for the breach
between the Church and
the world, with the extremes
of its music, is wider in our day than
ever in generations past.

President J. Reuben Clark Jr. (1871–1961),
one of our great Church leaders, explained it this
way: “We may not, under our duty, provide or tolerate
an unwholesome amusement on the theory that if we do
not provide it the youth will go elsewhere to get it. We
could hardly set up a roulette table in
the Church amusement hall for gam-
bling purposes, with the excuse that
if we do not provide it the youth
would go to a gambling hall to gam-
ble. We can never really hold our
youth thus.”

Nor is it proper to provide the
kind of music and atmosphere that
attracts youth in the world. You must
stand firm and not compromise with
what you know is right and good;
you must have the courage to turn
the lights up and the music down
when they don’t contribute to the
kind of atmosphere that produces
worthy thoughts; and you must insist
on high standards of dress and per-
formance from those who entertain
as well as those who attend.

I would counsel you to develop
your talents, and if you have musical
talent, think of this: There is much
music yet to be created, much to be
performed. Yours can be the worthy music that will be
uplifting, that will spread the gospel, touch hearts, give
comfort and strength to troubled minds.

There are many examples, both ancient and mod-
ern, that attest to the influence of righteous music.

Discouragement disappeared and minds were filled with
peace as the words to “Come, Come, Ye Saints” gave the
pioneers courage to face their trials. This same song has
been an inspiration
to many over the
years. At one time
I was talking to a
pilot who had just
returned from a
hazardous flight. We
spoke of courage



and of fear, and I asked how he had
held himself together in the face of
what he had endured. He said, “I
have a favorite hymn, and when it
was desperate, when there was little
hope that we would return, I would
keep it on my mind, and it was as
though the engines of the aircraft
would sing back to me.”

*Come, come, ye Saints,
No toil nor labor fear;
But with joy wend your way.
Though hard to you
This journey may appear,
Grace shall be as your day.²*

From this he clung to faith, the
one essential ingredient to courage.

The Lord Himself was prepared
for His greatest test through the
influence of music, for the scripture
records, “And when they had sung
an hymn, they went out into the
mount of Olives” (Mark 14:26).



Choose a Favorite Hymn

Remember, young people, I want each of you to
remember that this is your Church, and He is your Lord
and your Savior who stands at the helm. His constant

guidance and inspiration are available to you when you keep your mind filled to overflowing with the good, the beautiful, the inspiring. And this is one way to do it. Choose a favorite hymn or song, just as my pilot friend did, one with words that are uplifting and music that is reverent, one that makes you feel something akin to inspiration. There are many beautiful songs to choose from. Seek the guidance of the Spirit in making your selection. Go over the song in your mind carefully. Memorize it. Even though you have had no musical training, you can think through a simple song. Now use this as the course for your thoughts to follow. Make it your emergency channel.

Whenever you find shady actors slipping from the sidelines of your thinking onto the stage of your mind, put on this CD, as it were. It will change your whole mood.

Because the music is uplifting and clean, the baser thoughts will slip shamefully away. For while virtue, by choice, will not associate with filth, evil cannot tolerate the presence of light. In due time you will find yourself humming the music inwardly, almost automatically, to drive out unworthy thoughts. As you young people involve yourselves with righteous and worthwhile things, keep your minds filled with worthy thoughts, for as a man thinketh so is he, and you will have the ability to accomplish those things that will bring fulfillment to your lives.

You are a son or a daughter of Almighty God. I bear witness that God is our Father, that we are His children, that He loves us and has provided great and glorious things in this life. I know this, and I thank Him for the uplifting influence of good music, which has influenced my thoughts and uplifted my soul. ■

Adapted from an October 1973 general conference address.

NOTES

1. *Priesthood Bulletin*, Aug. 1973, 3.
2. *Hymns*, no. 30.

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