

# THE UNEXPECTED Signal

By Ben Bernards

My brother left home as a 14-year-old to attend an elite math and science academy boarding school. Although he came from a big family, he felt easily lost in the crowd. He saw all his older siblings go and live their lives, some in the Church and some not. Living away from home as a teenager, he found it easy to just not go to church. He didn't interact with a quorum or have weekly youth nights to attend. And so my family and I watched him finding his own way for a few years.

AS WE TEXTED, HE STARTED TO GET OUT ...

... OF THE SPIRITUAL DEAD SPACES.

PHOTOGRAPH FROM GETTY IMAGES

"HIS EXPERIENCE REMINDS ME OF THE BEAUTIFUL, SUBLIME TRUTH: THERE IS A GOD IN HEAVEN WHO LOVES US. AND HE CAN FIND WAYS TO TALK TO US."

TALK?

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7:42am

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He went to a university, and serving a mission just didn't enter his mind. I'd still try to find ways to stay in contact with him, whether it was discussing the philosophical differences in *Star Wars: Episode VII* vs. the Prequels or geeking out on our mutual admiration for Brandon Sanderson novels. Of all the ways we tried connecting with each other, talking about the gospel together never led to a strong bond between us.

Then one morning he texted me.

7:42 AM txt msg: "Hey man, can we talk?"

When you get a text like that early on a Sunday morning, yeah, you forget everything else that's going on and you talk.

He told me he'd just gotten a new apartment and a new roommate. He said, "Ben, I don't know any other way to explain this, but I got something like an impression in my heart that I needed to be both careful and helpful with this new guy . . . like I could be a light to him somehow, like I could somehow support him in his life. And I don't get it. I don't get those kinds of feelings."

I could read between the lines of what he was telling me. Heavenly Father was talking to him. I told him that sometimes when we use things like cell phones or laptops or radios, we may get weird little signals from places we weren't meaning to tune in to. Sometimes folks with ordinary terrestrial radios have picked up snippets of broadcasts from the International Space Station even though they weren't trying to. Sometimes people with baby monitors can hear phone conversations in neighboring apartments.

And sometimes God will send impressions to people who aren't used to talking to Him. Such impressions won't always be very strong and they won't override the agency we have. But sometimes we just may get a little pulse of a signal or a quiet whisper from Him trying to talk to us.

His experience reminds me of the beautiful, sublime truth: there is a God in heaven who loves us. And He can find ways to talk to us through little tiny promptings of the Spirit. And then we have the choice as to how we're going to respond.

So that's what I told him. "Are you going to find ways to maybe tune in a little bit more, seeing if you can get closer to His signal, shut out the noise, and hear His voice a little bit stronger? Are you going to actually act on what you feel? Or are you going to just let it wash over you and fade away?"

He said "Well, I think I know what I need to do."

We talked for a few more minutes, and I felt a prompting. And the irony wasn't lost on me; there I was, trying to help him have the courage to follow the Spirit, while I was simultaneously welling up my own courage to do the same.

I said a silent prayer, took a breath and big gulp and said, "You know, I think God is trying to call you back."

And what wonderful joy as I could hear him smile over the phone as his tension melted away.

He said, "I think He is too."

This may be the first time he realized on his own what God could really be. He felt that throughout his whole life people had talked to him about the Church, the gospel, and what he should do.

And now he could say he knew for himself. It was only small, candle-sized knowledge, but he knew that if he would take steps to get closer to the source of that signal, then he would get a stronger signal and the light would grow brighter.

There is a God who lives and knows each one of us. He's there. And if we tune in to His signals, get out of the spiritual dead spaces, eliminate the noises, and do what we can to truly listen, He'll speak to us in the ways we need to hear. **NE**

*The author lives in California, USA.*

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