

A Common Reason You May Be Missing God's Voice

It was a cold January morning when a violinist walked into a local metro station in Washington, D.C.

The temperatures were not conducive to any kind of receptivity from the passing travelers, but he came anyway. The idea of busking in this kind of environment would roll the eyes of any serious musician (and this man was more than just your average musician). This was to be an experiment, however, so he willingly obliged.

Standing by a concrete wall in the corner of the subway, he pulled out his violin and began to play. The chilled air made it difficult for his fingers, but he played along nonetheless. As he played, the concrete cave filled with the sound of music written many years before. Effortlessly, he plied his craft. It was not modern or contemporary music that he played. These pieces were classical songs that would be difficult for the most accomplished of violinists.

Over the course of 45 minutes, he would play through six Bach pieces. Because he was playing during the rush-hour period, it was calculated that thousands of people walking by him during this time. Most of these people were busy. They were on their way to work or focused on the day ahead. They were commuters who were familiar with the bustle of a D.C. Metro station, and they were used to ignoring busking musicians.

A few minutes passed, and a middle-aged man slowed his pace to listen. He stopped for a few seconds but then quickly picked up his pace so he would not miss his train. A minute later, the violinist would receive his first donation. Without even stopping, a woman threw money in the violinist's tip jar as she hurried past without thinking. A few minutes after that,

one individual would lean against a wall, listening, but after glancing at his watch, hurried off, clearly late for some appointment.

Others listened, paused and smiled but quickly moved on. The most attention received by the violinist was from children. One particular child stopped to look at the man playing his strange and enchanting song. His mother pushed hard to get the child to continue moving, and the child walked off, all the while turning his head back to look at the man playing. This was repeated by several children whose parents hurried along the way, determined to reach their destination.

During the course of his performance, only six people stopped what they were doing and gave the man the attention he deserved. Very few gave him any money, although that was the least of his concerns that morning. Most, in fact thousands, walked right past this violinist without giving him a second thought.

After completing his last piece, the musician packed up his violin and left the station. There was no applause, no hands shaken, no music sold. The concrete cave returned to its silent musings as commuters continue to wander on their way to their destination.

What most of these commuters were completely unaware of who it happened to be playing for them.

Months before, the *Washington Post* had asked Joshua Bell, one of the world's leading violin players, to join them in an experiment. They wanted to create a unique situation to determine people's perception, taste and priorities. In a commonplace environment at an inappropriate hour: Do people perceive beauty? Do they stop to appreciate it? Do they recognize the talent in an unexpected context?

They asked Joshua Bell to play for 45 minutes in a Washington, D.C. Metro station. He would play some of the most intricate

classical pieces ever written on a violin worth \$3.5 million. This was in stark contrast to a few nights before, when he sold out a theater in Boston for an average ticket price of \$100. On this day, however, he would walk away with \$32 and no applause.

What they discovered was more than just a lack of appreciation for talent. This was an inability to disconnect from the moment to appreciate something unexpected. This was a disregard for the beauty that surrounds because of things that were far more pressing.

In a common place at an unexpected time, do we have the capacity to perceive beauty? If thousands of people can walk right past one of the world's leading violinists playing some of the most intricate pieces ever written without even stopping, how much more are we missing out on? Worse still, if we are unable to perceive the things that are natural, how much more are we missing when it comes to things of a more spiritual nature? {eoa}

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