

# DEVELOPING TALENTS

Alene Wecker

As a mother of six young children, I was surprised when I received the impression to apply for grad school. I already held a bachelor of music, and though I taught voice lessons and sang in various community organizations, none of those things require credentials. It made little sense to put my two preschool-aged children into daycare just to advance a seemingly useless degree.

However, the prompting was undeniable. I was certain that the Lord must want me to further my education so I could begin singing professionally. He would put me on a path where I could use my talents to bless and edify the lives of others.

I was accepted into a master's program and began balancing work, kids, and school. Managing everyone's schedules was not easy, but I was constantly buoyed by the knowledge that God had a work for me to do and that I was exactly where I needed to be. I fully anticipated that he would continue to help me after graduation as I began searching for employment.

But the life of a professional American opera singer means a lot of travel, usually four to six weeks away for every gig. The thought of leaving my family for that length of time was heartrending. Another option was to work in Europe, where opera singers are employed by a single theater and therefore do not need to travel. But this would require uprooting my children from their friends and family to a place where they do not even speak the language. Though a transcontinental move presented logistical challenges that gave me panic attacks, I focused on my vision of what God planned for me and did everything in my power to make it happen. It wasn't until I began my European audition tour that I learned I didn't want to make the sacrifices a career

in opera would necessitate. Not only that, but it also wasn't what he wanted for me, either.

I returned home from Europe, discouraged and confused. Had I misunderstood Heavenly Father's promptings? What was I supposed to do now? Why had I sacrificed so much to earn a degree if I wasn't going to use it?

I continued to teach and sing with community organizations, but even that was stalled by the pandemic. Opera houses throughout the world closed. With zero engagements on the horizon and six children who needed assistance with distance learning, I lost all motivation to practice.

I stopped singing.

After months of silence, I shook the proverbial cobwebs off my voice, sat at the piano, and sang through some of my favorite pieces. I had forgotten the joy of singing. A sense of peace enveloped me, knowing that I was again on the path he had envisioned for me. And it wasn't in Europe, sharing my talents with thousands. It was in my own home, singing for the sheer joy of it, in the middle of a pandemic.

Even as I offered a prayer of gratitude for the gift of song and the happiness it brought me, I still felt that I wasn't doing enough. After all, what good is art if it is not shared? It becomes no more than an ungiven gift, like a feast prepared and plated but never eaten. Yes, I could sit and feast alone, but indulging in a solitary meal hardly feels like it justifies the hours of labor required to create such decadence. My time in school felt both wasteful and selfish since I had diverted my attention away from my family for apparently no reason.

The next day, I was studying the Lord's words to Oliver Cowdery in Doctrine and Covenants 5:4: "And you have a gift . . . and I have commanded that you should pretend to no other gift until my purpose is fulfilled in this." I pondered again on his purpose in gifting me with my voice. To what end? How was I supposed to use this gift? In the still, quiet hours of the morning, the answers came.

What if God gave me the gift of my voice for my *own* enjoyment? Not to bless others but simply because he loves me and wants me to be happy? What if he built into the very fiber of my soul a way to experience joy during trials? A way to escape, a way for my soul to expand, a way for my heart to take flight? What if he loved me enough to provide this freedom when the demands of my young family pressed so heavily upon me that I often struggled to meet my own most basic needs? An outlet so accessible—available even while washing dishes and rocking babes—that I wouldn't even recognize his blessing? What if he's waiting for me to drop my warped vision of his will and all the shame associated with developing the gift he gave me and use it for the sole purpose of feeling joy?

I learned that I don't have to share my gifts with thousands to fulfill his purpose because when I sing, I feel God's love for me.

And that is enough.

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ALENE WECKER {akwecker@gmail.com} obtained her master's degree in music from Brigham Young University in 2019 and then turned her attention to writing. She likes to tell herself her education comes in handy as she describes debutantes who, like herself, are frequently forced to display their mediocre skills at the pianoforte. Her debut novel, *An Engagement of Sorts*, was published by Covenant Communications in 2021.