

Making Music

How we face adversity says something about our character, resilience, strength, and even our faith, doesn't it? In fact, how we face adversity can become one of the most significant determiners of our future.

Have you heard the story about the great violinist, Itzhak Perlman and his facing of adversity? Perlman has spent a lifetime perfecting his skills as a violinist, and they are legendary. Of course, he needs his instrument in perfect condition to produce the music we know and love from him. Or does he?

One day, when just beginning a concert at Lincoln Center, one of the strings on Perlman's violin snapped. And rather than stopping the performance to replace the string or locate another violin, Perlman only paused for a moment or two before nodding to the conductor to continue. Then Perlman accomplished a near-impossibility. He played the remainder of the symphony on only three strings – modulating, improvising, re-composing the piece as he went.

When he concluded, the whole audience sat in stunned silence for a moment before jumping to its feet to applaud him with gratitude and amazement. They knew they had witnessed something truly extraordinary. Perlman held up his bow to call for silence, and said modestly, "Sometimes it is an artist's task to find out how much music he can still make with what he has left."

What gave Perlman the capacity to persevere in that fashion and make the music he was capable of producing, on only three strings? Perhaps his prior life challenges had helped to prepare him. He was struck by polio at a very young age and has great difficulty walking. His disability undoubtedly closed many avenues of employment to him. But it could not take his talent, energy, and commitment from him. His whole life had been an effort to make music with what he had left. And what music Perlman makes!

How are you at making music? Perhaps the instrument of your life has taken some blows. Maybe you find a string or two is weak and threatens to snap through illness, grief, hardship, or fear. Diminishment in life does not, however, have to mean that the show stops and the music ends. We can play on, play beautifully, play masterfully even, when we set ourselves to the task.

Do you have the faith to play on through adversity? The ancient psalmists claimed they could face anything and prevail because they drew strength from a source of power and permanence beyond themselves. They drew strength from God. As the calm and confident author of Psalm 46 states for us all: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult."

With such certainty in the help to be had from God, life can deal us what it will, and we can know we will not be overcome. So play on, play on!