

# ***We Labor Diligently to Write***

*(2 Nephi 25:23)*

## ***Introduction***

Brothers and sisters, I'm grateful to be here with you on another great day at BYU-Idaho. Sister Clark and I express our love and admiration for you, and I pray that the spirit will attend us as we talk about the power of language and writing.

In my most recent study of the Book of Ether, I came across certain principles that I felt inspired to share with you today. These principles revolve around the importance and purpose of language. During the time of the great tower, God saw fit to confound the language of the people as punishment for disobedient behavior and sinful desires. This confounding of tongues was the direct cause of the great assortment of spoken and written languages throughout the world today.

The importance of language is emphasized in Ether 1:34-35, as the brother of Jared pleads for the language of his people to not be confounded: "And the brother of Jared being a large and mighty man, and a man highly favored of the Lord, Jared his brother, said unto him: Cry unto the Lord that he will not confound us that we may not understand our words. And it came to pass that the brother of Jared did cry unto the Lord, and the Lord had compassion upon Jared; therefore he did not confound the language of Jared; and Jared and his brother were not confounded."

There is great power in language! Moses 7:13 describes the power of the language which God had given to Enoch, words so powerful that when "...he spake the word of the Lord...mountains fled....rivers of water turned out of their course...the roar of the lions were

heard from out of the wilderness; and all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the language which God had given him.”

But even more relevant to us today is the written word and it’s place in our social, familial, and professional associations. Our many wonderful English and Communication majors can attest that writing is one of the most crucial elements of human interaction. With that being the case, the ability to write and write well ranks highly among the most important skills we can possess. I’d like to highlight three ways in which writing is essential to us as Latter-day Saints and citizens abroad.

## ***Thinking***

The first way that we, as Latter-day Saints, can use the power of writing is to help us think well. Many people mistakenly believe that the relationship between our thoughts and our words is one way: starting with thought and ending with words. Speaking about the importance of writing as we study, the gospel the missionary guide, *Preach My Gospel*, gives three reasons why it is important to write. It says, “a study journal [will] help you understand, clarify, and remember what you are learning” (x). Right now I want to talk about the first two: writing will help us to understand what we learn and writing will help us to clarify what we learn.

How many of you have had the following experience: While you and some friends, or perhaps family members, are talking about how you all are going to solve a problem you are suddenly struck with a brilliant idea. Excited, you begin to tell them, but as you hear your own words you realize that your idea isn’t a very good one. In fact sometimes I have realized mine were foolish. Thankfully, the reverse also happens from time to time, and I realize that my idea is better than I thought and that it is founded on truth.

The same experience of clarity and understanding can happen to an even greater degree through writing carefully. The very act of writing can slow our minds down and make us think about our words. This leads us to further thoughts that will give clarity and understanding. The understanding that comes from writing down knowledge we have gained is similar to the understanding that comes when we teach. This is because as we use that knowledge we recognize the gaps and perhaps inconsistencies in our thoughts. This provides us with the opportunity to learn.

We can use writing to increase our understanding and the clarity of our thoughts in all aspects of life. As *Preach My Gospel* suggests, keeping a spiritual study journal will help us learn and understand spiritual things. Another place we use, or ought to use, a study journal is in classes of secular learning. I challenge each of you do to more than copy down the bullet points from presentations. Instead, write brief summaries of what you are learning. If you don't feel like you can write down anything, write down things you remember but didn't understand. Then go study until you do understand and can write about them.

## ***Communicating***

The second way we must use the power of the written word is through effective communication. Consider how the clarity of our thoughts is essential in writing as form of effective communication. As we contemplate the effectivity of our writing we should ask a few questions. What does our writing reveal about us? How well do we represent ourselves? You are preparing to effectively communicate in the workplace where an important part of your work will require effective communication in the form of writing. Determine now to be sincere and thoughtful with every word you write while at this institution. Those who can effectively

represent themselves in writing have a great advantage in the workplace and will contribute significantly to building the kingdom.

Each day we teach and learn from one another. You regularly communicate in writing with your peers here at school according to the learning model. During your school career, writing may play a larger role in your life than it ever has before. When you leave this institution, do not go back to old habits. You should be writing daily as a form of communication. Learn to express yourself in writing without the benefit of body language and speech.

Writing allows communication to be expressed orderly. Writing gives organization to our reasoning when proper writing principles are observed. Writing allows its author to express opinion and demonstrate understanding. Writing can be persuasive. Through clear writing, an author can persuade others to join in his opinion. Writing also paves the way for its authors to speak clearly. When we practice writing with order and purpose, our verbal communication improves also. We begin to speak with greater organization and purpose. We learn to express ourselves in fewer words.

In all of your writing, give your best effort. What you create is an expression of who you are and what you stand for. When you obey the commandments and have faith in the Savior, you will be given the words necessary to communicate yourself effectively through writing. According to your preparation, the Lord will bless you to communicate what is necessary in writing. When writing in your classes, do not settle less than your best. Remember that this is a time for learning and growth; you are not just trying to get through the motions to pass your classes.

The newspaper and Internet are great ways for you to learn about current events. Stay updated in these things. Learn to write well so that you can both understand the necessary

materials for involvement in government. You'll need to understand how to write concisely and persuasively should you someday choose to voice your opinion.

Now a word of caution. Be careful in choosing the literature you invite into your life. Surround yourself with literature that is uplifting. Yesterday a young man on this campus explained that when he questions whether a type of material is appropriate, he uses the tools found in Moroni. "Every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God" (Moroni 7:13). Does the literature persuade you to do good? Does it inspire good thoughts and actions? Remember that communication is a two-way relationship. How do you filter the written material available to you? In a technology-savvy world, how do you ensure that the writing you export and import "is inspired of God"? If the material you question, be it exported or imported, does not meet these standards, and you do not dismiss the material from your life, it will do you harm.

Determine now that when you leave this institution of learning, you will continue to write sincerely in all your forms of communication. Texting does not count. Appreciate this time that is dedicated for you to learn to communicate effectively through the written word. The time will come when you will be grateful that you have chosen to represent yourself and communicate effectively in writing.

## ***Remembering***

As we become more comfortable with writing, we begin to see it as a means of exploration. All of us can probably remember a particular instance in which we were writing and it almost seemed as if the ideas that were flowing through us were not ours. I have had many such experiences—regardless of whether they were instances of academic enterprise, scripture

study, or self reflection. In fact, some of the most beneficial discoveries have been about my own life and experience.

Writing is powerful, brothers and sisters. Writing can capture a moment like no other medium. Robert Frost, in his poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” writes of a man on horseback who stops to watch the snow fall in a forest. The last stanza reads:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.

What else but writing could convey the air of mystery surrounding that seemingly insignificant moment? This is one of Frost’s most studied pieces, and if it warrants such thought and reflection, what can we learn from writing about our own lives? As I said before, writing is exploration, and as you strive to keep a record of the events in your life, I promise your memory will be opened further.

President Henry B. Eyring has spoken of his own experience in keeping a journal. As he wrote daily of the ways the Lord had blessed him and his family, he began to notice these blessings. He said:

More than gratitude began to grow in my heart. Testimony grew. I became ever more certain that our Heavenly Father hears and answers prayers. I felt more gratitude for the softening and refining that come because of the Atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ. And I grew more confident that the Holy Ghost can bring all things to our remembrance—even things we did not notice or pay attention to when they happened.

Brothers and sisters, write to remember. A student here at BYU–Idaho once told me that he regretted not keeping a journal on his mission. He recognized that he could not remember but a fraction of his mission, and had since written down those tender experiences that he were still with him. Every once in a while, he said, a long-forgotten memory would come to him and he would rush to write it down, so as not to lose it again. As he did this he found that these ‘lost’ moments often connected to others, and more was recovered than expected. How grateful he must have been for that lesson, and how regretful that he did not learn it sooner.

These memories may not be for us. Let us not forget the many, many hands that wrote and crafted the Holy Scriptures, one of our greatest sources of knowledge, wisdom, and strength. Everything recorded in the scriptures was at one point someone’s memory. Just as we can learn from the memories of others, so too can our recorded memories be beneficial.

## ***Conclusion***

Moroni notes the power of writing when he says: “For thou madest him [the brother of Jared] that the things which he wrote were mighty *even as thou art*, unto the overpowering of man to read them” (Ether 12:24, emphasis added).

Words have power, even to the capacity of being as mighty as the Lord. Words have the ability to create intense emotions and desires as we use them to think, communicate, and remember. It is important that we use this power wisely.

Recall the fervent warning Mosiah has given us:

But this much I can tell you, if you do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of

our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not. (Mosiah 4:30)

Our thoughts become our words, which become our actions. The warning is clear: our words become our actions, and if we remember not to bridle them, we will be judged accordingly in the last days. It is vital we remember and observe.

Words have a sense of permanency that no other things do—they can last for generations when recorded. With the Internet, directors of popular sites can archive what we write there, so even after we think we've deleted it, it's still available for others to read. Because your words represent you, make them worthy of that representation. Remember also who you represent.

My dear brothers and sisters, I urge you to consider the power and importance of writing. If you use it wisely, writing can be a wonderful asset that will inspire and support you and those with whom you come in contact now and throughout eternity. I so testify that words have been given to us to do good: let us use them as such.

I leave with you my witness that God lives. Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. He is the Word of God, and if we allow His word to direct ours, we will be a tool in helping bring others back home. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.