

# The Language of the Gospel

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Powerful teaching is extremely important to preserve the gospel in our families, and it requires diligence and effort.

After being called as a General Authority, I moved with my family from Costa Rica to Salt Lake City for my first assignment. Here in the United States, I have been blessed to visit wonderful people of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. Among them are many who, like me, were born in the countries of Latin America.

I have noticed that many of the first-generation Hispanics here speak Spanish as their primary language and enough English to communicate with others. The second generation, who were either born in the United States or came at an early age and attend school here, speak very good English and perhaps some broken Spanish. And often by the third generation, Spanish, the native language of their ancestors, is lost.<sup>1</sup>

In linguistic terms, this is simply called “language loss.” Language loss may happen when families move to a foreign land where their native language is not predominant. It happens not only among Hispanics but also among populations throughout the world where a native language is replaced in favor of a new one.<sup>2</sup> Even Nephi, a prophet in the Book of Mormon, was concerned about losing the native language of his fathers when he was preparing to move to the promised land. Nephi writes, “Behold, it is wisdom in God that we should obtain these records, that *we may preserve unto our children the language of our fathers.*”<sup>3</sup>

But Nephi was also concerned about losing another kind of language. In the next verse, he continues, “And also that *we may preserve unto them the words which have been spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets, which have been delivered unto them by the Spirit and power of God, since the world began, even down unto this present time.*”<sup>4</sup>

I noticed a similarity between preserving a mother tongue and preserving the gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives.

Today in my analogy, I would like to emphasize not any particular earthly language but rather an eternal language that must be preserved in our families and never lost. I speak of the language<sup>5</sup> of the gospel of Jesus Christ. By “language of the gospel,” I mean all the teachings of our prophets, our obedience to those teachings, and our following righteous traditions.

I will discuss three ways that this language can be preserved.

## First: Being More Diligent and Concerned at Home

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord invited many prominent members of the Church, including Newel K. Whitney, to set their homes in order. The Lord said, "My servant Newel K. Whitney ... hath need to be chastened, and set in order his family, and see that *they are more diligent and concerned at home*, and pray always, or they shall be removed out of their place."<sup>6</sup>

One factor that influences language loss is when parents don't spend time teaching their children the native language. It is not enough to merely *speak* the language in the home. If parents desire to preserve their language, it must be *taught*. Research has found that parents who make a conscious effort to preserve their native language tend to succeed in doing so.<sup>7</sup> So what would be a conscious effort to preserve the language of the gospel?

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles cautioned that "weak gospel teaching and modeling in the home" is a powerful cause that may break the cycle of multigenerational families in the Church.<sup>8</sup>

We can therefore conclude that powerful teaching is extremely important to preserve the gospel in our families, and it requires diligence and effort.

We have been invited many times to acquire the practice of daily family and personal scripture study.<sup>9</sup> Many families that are doing this are blessed each day with greater unity and a closer relationship with the Lord.

When will daily scripture study happen? It will happen when parents take the scriptures in hand and, with love, invite the family to gather together to study. It is difficult to see this study happening in any other way.

Fathers and mothers, don't miss out on these great blessings. Don't wait until it's too late!

## Second: Strong Modeling in the Home

One linguistics expert wrote that to preserve a native language, "you need to *bring the language alive* for your children."<sup>10</sup> We "bring language alive" when our teaching and modeling work together.

When I was young, I worked in my father's factory during vacations. The first question my father always asked after I received my salary was "What are you going to do with your money?"

I knew the answer and responded, "Pay my tithing and save for my mission."

After working with him for about eight years and constantly answering his same question, my father figured he had taught me about paying my tithing. What he didn't realize was that I had learned this important principle in just one weekend. Let me tell you how I learned that principle.

After some events related to a civil war in Central America, my father's business went bankrupt. He went from about 200 full-time employees to fewer than five sewing operators who worked as needed in the garage of our home. One day during those difficult times, I heard my parents discussing whether they should pay tithing or buy food for the children.

On Sunday, I followed my father to see what he was going to do. After our Church meetings, I saw him take an envelope and put his tithing in it. That was only part of the lesson. The question that remained for me was what we were going to eat.

Early Monday morning, some people knocked on our door. When I opened it, they asked for my father. I called for him, and when he arrived, the visitors told him about an urgent sewing order they needed as quickly as possible. They told him that the order was so urgent that they would pay for it in advance. That day I learned the principles of paying tithing and the blessings that follow.

In the New Testament, the Lord talks about modeling. He says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."<sup>11</sup>

It is not enough just to *talk* to our children about the importance of temple marriage, fasting, and keeping the Sabbath day holy. They must see us making room in our schedules to attend the temple as frequently as we can. They need to see our commitment to fasting regularly<sup>12</sup> and keeping the entire Sabbath day holy. If our youth cannot fast two meals, cannot study the scriptures regularly, and cannot turn off the TV during a big game on Sunday, will they have the spiritual self-discipline to resist the powerful temptations of today's challenging world, including the temptation of pornography?

### Third: Traditions

Another way language can be altered or lost is when other languages and traditions are mixed with a mother tongue.<sup>13</sup>

In the early years of the restored Church, the Lord invited many prominent members of the Church to set their homes in order. He began His invitation by addressing two ways we may lose light and truth from our homes: "That wicked one cometh and *taketh away light and truth*, through *disobedience*, from the children of men, and *because of the tradition of their fathers*."<sup>14</sup>

As families, we need to avoid any tradition that will prevent us from keeping the Sabbath day holy or having daily scripture study and prayer at home. We need to close the digital doors of our home to pornography and all other evil influences. To combat the worldly traditions of our day, we need to use the scriptures and the voice of our modern prophets to teach our children about their divine identity, their purpose in life, and the divine mission of Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

In the scriptures, we find several examples of “language loss.”<sup>15</sup> For example:

“Now it came to pass that there were many of the rising generation that *could not understand the words* of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people; and they did not believe the tradition of their fathers. ...

“And now because of their unbelief *they could not understand the word of God*; and their hearts were hardened.”<sup>16</sup>

For the rising generation, the gospel became a strange language. And while the benefits of maintaining a native language are sometimes debated, in the context of the plan of salvation there is *no debate* about the eternal consequences of losing the language of the gospel in our homes.

As children of God, we are imperfect people trying to learn a perfect language.<sup>17</sup> Just as a mother is compassionate with her little children, our Heavenly Father is patient with our imperfections and mistakes. He treasures and understands our feeblest utterances, mumbled in sincerity, as if they were fine poetry. He rejoices at the sound of our first gospel words. He teaches us with perfect love.

No achievement in this life, important as it may be, will be relevant if we lose the language of the gospel in our families.<sup>18</sup> It is my testimony that Heavenly Father will bless us in our efforts as we strive to embrace His language, even until we become fluent in this higher level of communication, which always was our mother tongue. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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