

Words Matter

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Words set a tone. They voice our thoughts, feelings, and experiences, for good or bad.

Brothers, sisters, and friends across the world, I am honored to address this vast audience, many of whom are members of our Church and many of whom are friends and new listeners to this conference broadcast. Welcome!

The messages shared from this pulpit are communicated in words. They are given in English and translated into nearly 100 different languages. Always the base is the same. Words. And words matter a lot. Let me say that again. Words matter!

They are the bedrock of how we connect; they represent our beliefs, morals, and perspectives. Sometimes we speak words; other times we listen. Words set a tone. They voice our thoughts, feelings, and experiences, for good or bad.

Unfortunately, words can be thoughtless, hasty, and hurtful. Once said, we cannot take them back. They can wound, punish, cut down, and even lead to destructive actions. They can weigh heavily on us.

On the other hand, words can celebrate victory, be hopeful and encouraging. They can prompt us to rethink, reboot, and redirect our course. Words can open our minds to truth.

That is why, first and foremost, the Lord's words matter.

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Alma and his people in ancient America encountered endless warfare with those who had disregarded the word of God, hardened their hearts, and corrupted their culture. The faithful could have fought, but Alma counseled: "And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God."¹

The "word of God" surpasses all other expressions. It has been so since the Creation of the earth when the Lord spoke: "Let there be light: and there was light."²

From the Savior came these assurances in the New Testament: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."³

And this: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."⁴

And from Mary, the mother of Jesus, came this humble testimony: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.”⁵

Believing and heeding the word of God will draw us closer to Him. President Russell M. Nelson has promised, “If you will study His words, your ability to be more like Him will increase.”⁶

Don’t we all want to be, as the hymn says, “more blessed and holy—more, Savior, like thee”?⁷

I picture young Joseph Smith on his knees hearing the words of his Father in Heaven: “[Joseph,] This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!”⁸

We “hear Him” in the words of scripture, but do we let them just sit on the page, or do we recognize He is speaking to us? Do we change?

We “hear Him” in personal revelation and promptings from the Holy Ghost, in answers to prayer, and in those moments when only Jesus Christ, through the power of His Atonement, can lift our burdens, grant us forgiveness and peace, and embrace us “in the arms of his love.”⁹

Second, the words of prophets matter.

Prophets testify of the divinity of Jesus Christ. They teach His gospel and show His love for all.¹⁰ I bear my witness that our living prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, hears and speaks the word of the Lord.

President Nelson has a way with words. He has said, “Keep on the covenant path,”¹¹ “Gather Israel,”¹² “Let God prevail,”¹³ “Build bridges of understanding,”¹⁴ “Give thanks,”¹⁵ “Increase your faith in Jesus Christ,”¹⁶ “Take charge of your testimony,”¹⁷ and “Become a peacemaker.”¹⁸

Most recently, he has asked us to “think celestial.” “When you are confronted with a dilemma,” he said, “think celestial! When tested by temptation, think celestial! When life or loved ones let you down, think celestial! When someone dies prematurely, think celestial. ... When the pressures of life crowd in upon you, think celestial! ... As you think celestial, your heart will gradually change, ... you will view trials and opposition in a new light, ... [and] your faith will increase.”¹⁹

When we think celestial, we see “things as they really are, and ... really will be.”²⁰ In this world burdened with confusion and contention, we all need that perspective.

Elder George Albert Smith, long before becoming President of the Church, spoke of sustaining the prophet and heeding his words. He said: “The obligation that we make when we raise our hands ... is a most sacred one. ... It means ... that we will stand behind him; we will pray for him; ... and we will strive to carry out his instructions as the Lord shall direct.”²¹ In other words, we will diligently act upon our prophet’s words.

As one of 15 prophets, seers, and revelators sustained yesterday by our worldwide Church, I want to share with you one of my experiences sustaining the prophet and embracing his words. It was for me much like the prophet Jacob, who recounted, “I had heard the voice of the Lord speaking unto me in very word.”²²

Last October my wife, Melanie, and I were in Bangkok, Thailand, as I was preparing to dedicate what would be the Church’s 185th temple.²³ For me, the assignment was both surreal and

humbling. This was the first temple on the Southeast Asia peninsula.²⁴ It was masterfully designed—a six-story, nine-spired structure, “fitly framed”²⁵ to be a house of the Lord. For months I had contemplated the dedication. What had settled in my soul and mind was that the country and the temple had been cradled in the arms of prophets and apostles. President Thomas S. Monson had announced the temple²⁶ and President Nelson the dedication.²⁷

I had prepared the dedicatory prayer months earlier. Those sacred words had been translated into 12 languages. We were ready. Or so I thought.

The night before the dedication, I was awakened from my sleep with an unsettled, urgent feeling about the dedicatory prayer. I tried to set aside the prompting, thinking the prayer was in place. But the Spirit would not leave me alone. I sensed certain words were missing, and by divine design they came to me in revelation, and I inserted these words in the prayer near the end: “May we think celestial, letting Thy Spirit prevail in our lives, and strive to be peacemakers always.”²⁸ The Lord was reminding me to heed the words of our living prophet: “Think celestial,” “let the Spirit prevail,” “strive to be peacemakers.” Words of the prophet matter to the Lord and to us.

Third, and so very important, are our own words. Believe me, in our emoji-filled²⁹ world, our words matter.

Our words can be supportive or angry, joyful or mean, compassionate or tossed aside. In the heat of the moment, words can sting and sink painfully deep into the soul—and stay there. Our words on the internet, texting, social media, or tweets take on a life of their own. So be careful what you say and how you say it. In our families, especially with husbands, wives, and children, our words can bring us together or drive a wedge between us.

Let me suggest three simple phrases that we can use to take the sting out of difficulties and differences, lift, and reassure each other:

“Thank you.”

“I am sorry.”

And “I love you.”

Do not save these humble phrases for a special event or catastrophe. Use them often and sincerely, for they show regard for others. Talk is growing cheap; do not follow that pattern.

We can say “thank you” on the elevator, in the parking lot, at the market, in the office, in a queue, or with our neighbors or friends. We can say “I am sorry” when we make a mistake, miss a meeting, forget a birthday, or see someone in pain. We can say “I love you,” and those words carry the message “I am thinking about you,” “I care about you,” “I am here for you,” or “You are everything to me.”

Let me share a personal example. Husbands, take heed. Sisters, this is going to help you too. Before my full-time assignment in the Church, I traveled widely for my company. I was gone a fair amount of time to far reaches of the world. At the end of my day, no matter where I was, I always called home. When my wife, Melanie, picked up the phone and I reported in, our conversation always led us to expressing “I love you.” Every day, those words served as an

anchor to my soul and my conduct; they were a protection to me from evil designs. “Melanie, I love you” spoke of the precious trust between us.

President Thomas S. Monson used to say, “There are feet to steady, hands to grasp, minds to encourage, hearts to inspire, and souls to save.”³⁰ Saying “thank you,” “I am sorry,” “I love you” will do just that.

Brothers and sisters, words do matter.

I promise that if we “feast upon the words of Christ”³¹ that lead to salvation, our prophet’s words that guide and encourage us, and our own words that speak of who we are and what we hold dear, the powers of heaven will pour down upon us. “The words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.”³² We are Heavenly Father’s children and He is our God, and He expects us to speak with “the tongue of angels”³³ by the power of the Holy Ghost.³⁴

I love the Lord Jesus Christ. He is, in the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”³⁵ And as the Apostle John made clear, Jesus Christ Himself is “the Word.”³⁶

Of this I testify as an Apostle called to the Lord’s divine service—to declare His word—and called to stand as a special witness of Him. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Alma 31:5.
2. Genesis 1:3.
3. Matthew 24:35.
4. John 14:23.
5. Luke 1:38.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “I Studied More Than 2,200 Scriptures about the Savior in Six Weeks: Here Is a Little of What I Learned,” *Inspiration* (blog), Feb. 28, 2017, ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
7. “More Holiness Give Me,” *Hymns*, no. 131.
8. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
9. The prophet Lehi describes “the arms of his love” in his declaration to his sons: “But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1:15).
10. President Russell M. Nelson said, “Prophets testify of Jesus Christ—of His divinity and of His earthly mission and ministry” (“Sustaining the Prophets,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 74).
11. Russell M. Nelson, “As We Go Forward Together,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Apr. 2018, 7.
12. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), Gospel Library.

13. Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 92.
14. Russell M. Nelson, “President Nelson Shares Social Post about Racism and Calls for Respect for Human Dignity,” June 1, 2020, newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
15. Russell M. Nelson, in Sarah Jane Weaver, “President Nelson Invites Us to #GiveThanks,” *Church News*, Nov. 20, 2020, thechurchnews.com.
16. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 98.
17. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity” (worldwide devotional for young adults, May 15, 2022), Gospel Library.
18. Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 99; see also facebook.com/reel/277880588051925.
19. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2023, 118–19.
20. Jacob 4:13.
21. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: George Albert Smith* (2011), 64.
22. Jacob 7:5.
23. The Bangkok Thailand Temple was dedicated on October 22, 2023.
24. The temple district reaches beyond Thailand’s borders, spanning Cambodia to Pakistan, Nepal to Indonesia.
25. Ephesians 2:21.
26. See Thomas S. Monson, “Blessings of the Temple,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 91.
27. See “News for Temples in Five Nations,” Mar. 27, 2023, newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
28. See dedicatory prayer for the Bangkok Thailand Temple, temples.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
29. An emoji, often a little yellow face, is a pictogram embedded in an electronic message to convey a feeling, expression, or idea.
30. Thomas S. Monson, “To the Rescue,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 48; *Liahona*, July 2001, 57.
31. 2 Nephi 32:3.
32. 2 Nephi 32:3.
33. 2 Nephi 32:2.
34. Nephi wrote, “For when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1).
35. Isaiah 9:6.

36. John 1:1.