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## Writing to Share Light

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# Loren Marks

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## Write to Share Light

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The classical scholar Hugh Nibley suggested that humankind's single greatest invention is the written word.<sup>1</sup> When you and I received the sister gifts of reading and writing, we were empowered to receive and convey thought across time and space. What a panoramic prospect!

With these gifts, two questions arise. What will we read and what will we write?

At its best, the college experience hones our lived response to these vital questions. The eminent historian Christopher Lasch wrote that “college life [should be] less like that of an undergraduate country club, and more of an intellectual workshop where men and women in the fire of their youth . . . come to serve an apprenticeship under the masters of the time.”<sup>2</sup>

Part of that apprenticeship involves studying out of the best books and available literature, prompting a sense of indebtedness for the giants' shoulders of knowledge and experience upon which we stand. While our apprenticeship of seeking to understand never ends,

there is a time when we transition to contributing to the “intellectual workshop” in our own right.

These contributions can take different forms, but Lasch exhorted social scientists to “counter the trend toward narrowly empirical scholarship inaccessible to a broader public.”<sup>3</sup> Framed differently, we have a responsibility to, first, study deeply and then to translate important findings to the human family outside the constrained corridors of relational science.

In this respect, *Family Perspectives* is a dualistic gift. I share the view of Hal Boyd, who wrote in a prefatory note for *Family Perspectives*, “In each article the flame is lit, and the torch is passed. The light comes from within and from the best of social science and contemporary thought. Pieced together, these points of light—these emerging scholars— provide me with ample hope for a brighter world.”<sup>4</sup>

Pulitzer Prize winning author and psychiatrist Robert Coles has contended that the best books are worthy to be called such because their messages invite us to

become our better selves. I believe that the best social science can have a similar influence, when clearly conveyed with disciplined “fire.” The study of human relationships, including an acute awareness of what hurts and what heals, can help us better learn and live the healer’s art.

Long before social science, the Judeo-Christian wisdom literature issued clarion calls across millennia of human relationships and experience. Indeed, I have been struck by how often the most rigorous social science findings harmonize with the teachings of the prophets. I concur with Betsy VanDenBerghe that “the accumulation of good science over time almost always bolsters prophetic voices.”<sup>5</sup> The venerated family researcher Wes Burr once told me that after nearly five decades of research and writing, one of the most important truths he had learned was that “it is kindness that matters most.” Nearly two thousand years earlier, the Apostle Paul taught, “And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (see 1 Corinthians 13:13).

In 1995, a small assembly of modern apostles and prophets recorded and re-sacralized certain [foundational principles](#) regarding family relationships. As my wife Sandra and I prepare to celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary next month, I find myself deeply indebted to those truths—personally and professionally, religiously and relationally. I am grateful to the prophets who have written and recorded timeless wisdom related to relationships. I have lamented my hubris when I did not heed these truths—and have found deeper love for God and for others when I have heard and honored their written messages.

*Family Perspectives* offers an outlet to the Brigham Young University School of Family Life’s undergraduate women and men—an outlet to reflect on the best of what they have discovered and, with appropriate “fire,” to share the gems from their intellectual mining. For the rest of us—people in families in the real world—we are granted access to the hearts and minds of a remarkable rising generation whose time has come.

To this rising generation, I write in order that you may be wiser than I have been. I also share my belief that as vital as writing is, the pen of behavior is typically much mightier. Indeed, “Our behavior is permission to others to behave similarly, but it is more than that . . . it is an invitation to do so.”<sup>6</sup>

May we deeply and humbly study the ancient and modern histories of human relationships. May we not think ourselves wiser than the prophets. May we write carefully, striving to bless others by more clearly marking the trail of truth. Finally, may our behavioral pens issue invitations that draw us nearer to one another and to the Creator of us all.

*Loren Marks is a professor in Brigham Young University’s School of Family Life where he is co-director (with Dr. David Dollahite) of the American Families of Faith National Research Project (<http://AmericanFamiliesofFaith.byu.edu>). He and his wife Sandra have five (almost always delightful) children, three of whom currently attend BYU.*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Nibley, H. (1988). Genesis of the written word. In *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (pp. 101-128). BYU Religious Studies Center.

<sup>2</sup> Lasch, C. (2002). Plain Style: *A Guide to Written English*. University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> Lasch, C. (2002). Plain Style: *A Guide to Written English*. University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Boyd, H. (2019). *A fire lit*. [Family Perspectives](#), 1(1).

<sup>5</sup> VanDenBerghe, B. (2020). *Authoritative voices*. [Family Perspectives](#), 1(2).

<sup>6</sup> Marks, L. D., & Dollahite, D. C. (2017). *Religion and Families*. Routledge, p. 14.