

# Creating Responsibly: The Interplay between My Faith and My Creative Life

**Presenter: Brandon Mull**

*This is a transcript of a presentation given on September 24–26, 2020, at the annual conference of the Latter-day Saint Publishing and Media Association (LDSPMA). You may not reproduce or publish this material without prior written consent from LDSPMA.*

**Brandon Mull:** Hello there! I am happy for the chance to talk to you, and we are going to, I'm going to do my best to share a little bit about my journey as a writer and my journey of trying to do something good along with, you know, have a successful career trying to do some good in the world.

For me, I liked to write ever since I was a little kid. Well, I guess that's not totally true. I like to make up stories ever since I was a little kid.

I'm imagining, if you're watching this, you're probably kind of like me in the sense that you like to create.

And, you know, I think a lot of you probably like to create with words, and I love to create with words. And I love to create with stories in my mind. You know, but before I used words to communicate those stories I would live in my head as a kid. My parents knew and thought I was kind of a weird kid because I would like, just be alone in a room, and I would roam around that room, and I'd like fight an imaginary bad guys and I'm kicking the couch like, not doing damage usually, I don't think, but definitely living in my own mind and playing out scenarios. And I could do that alone for weird amounts of time because I've always had just kind of a vivid imagination and a rich inner life.

And I was aware if someone else was looking at me doing that. I knew it looked weird. I didn't want anyone to look at me doing that. But if I could just be alone, I could really get lost in it and really live scenarios in my imagination. And as a little kid, I think like a lot of creators it started out by copying stuff.

I would live out the cartoons I watched, in my mind, or I would live out, one of my favorite imaginary games as a little boy was to pretend I jumped off one of the rides at Disneyland and was now like hanging out with the Pirates of the Caribbean and riding the flying carpet on It's a Small World, and just very much little kid fantasies. But to me, it was fun to play them out and kind of live them.

And as I got older, the stories became more my own that I had in my head. And the stories became cooler, and I maybe stopped being quite as kinetic with them, though I still pace around a lot to think, and so maybe that ties back into those games I played when I was a little boy.

But there reached a point where the stories in my mind seemed better than some of the books that I read or cooler than some of the movies I saw, and I wanted to share them with other people. And I'll tell you at first that felt really daunting. Because I remember when I first wrote, write a story. When I was done, I looked down at what I'd written and just thought I must be a simpleton.

Because what I saw on the page did not reflect the richness of the stories I saw in my head.

And I would come back and I compared it against my favorite writers and was like, oh man, like what's in my mind seems really cool, but what I see on this page isn't very cool anymore.

And that was the start of me learning that it would take some time and practice and effort if I was going to get good at the craft of taking the stories that I saw in my head and turning them into written scenes in a way that readers could enjoy. And I spent years working on that because for some reason that itch to create and to shared just couldn't die, wouldn't die. It's kind of been my favorite part of who I am. My favorite part of how my head works. My favorite tasks to engage with has always been daydreaming and creating.

I do it if I'm stuck in traffic. I do it if I'm bored in the shower, I do it if I'm bored in a class somewhere. I guess I get bored easy and I cope with real life, or I cope with boredom by making up stories.

Now by around high school, I was really starting to hope that, man, maybe I can take this talent and make a living with it because how great would that be to do something I really like as my job? And it was scary and frustrating because I remember in high school I was getting better. I was getting better at translating what I saw in my head into stories. And I wrote some short stories and some, even like a couple novellas like really long short stories.

And I was finally making stuff that at least that was pretty cool. Like, I began to be proud of it. Would show a friend or show, you know, show people, and I started to get pretty good feedback on what I was doing. And more or less, it was clear to me I wasn't like a professional caliber yet but that I was starting to be able to make stuff that was closer to my goal, right? Where like a reader could enjoy it. And I remember when I went to college, I was so on the fence about what to do.

It's scary at that age because I knew I was smart. I'd been successful in school. If I tried hard in just about any class I could get an A.

And, you know, like smart enough that with effort, I felt like I could do almost any job.

And to some degree, I had my parents, who were worried about me trying to do a job like writing, where it seemed very uncertain to them. It seemed very uncertain to me if I could, you know, support a family.

And here's the thing. So I'm a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, like I think a lot of you guys are too.

And I'm telling the story kind of from that perspective. When I speak to a lot of groups, I can't really as directly tie my faith in. It wouldn't be maybe appropriate or completely relevant, you know, at certain book conferences for me to hit my faith too hard in connection with my writing if they came to hear about my writing. But here I'm happy because my faith played such a crucial role in the path that led me to become a writer and in the choice of the kind of things I write.

One of the hard things about being a young writer or a young creator is as you get good at creating, you can create anything.

You know, if you can draw, there's not really limits on what you draw. Just your imagination and your talent, and writing was like that too.

And I remember I would, I liked action scenes; I liked adventure stories and action scenes. And so I would experiment with stuff that sometimes felt kind of dark. You know, like I would tell stories where kind of the point of the story was the main character was going to die in a horrible way, and it was gonna let me do this like fun action scene or like scary moment or you know. And I was good at it. I could imagine really vividly. And I could tell those stories pretty well. And I'm grateful that now, I've learned that there's more to a story than just like a thrill or a spike of

adrenaline. But back then, that's, the fact that I could make that adrenaline spike moment in a story was the only reason I was writing, you know at like 17 or something.

And I think maybe as I talk to you today, I'll explain a little bit how that matured.

But when I went to BYU, I really didn't like it, that first semester because I wasn't used to being on my own. And it would have had nothing to do with me not liking the school; it was just me not liking being on my own.

But after I served a mission, I came back and then everything seemed a lot easier. My mission for me was important because, I've always had a testimony of the Church. Like I've always kind of operated on good faith that my parents taught me correctly. I was raised a member of the Church, and of course, like most thinking people, as I hit my teenage years, I was asking those questions. Well, I believe this, but is it really true. And like I want to believe this. I want to believe my family can be together forever. I want to believe, you know, there's a Savior who can heal me and help me and loves me. And I mean nothing I've been taught was something I didn't want to be true. I wanted it to be true. I just wasn't sure.

And I had some experiences before my mission where I felt like I really recognized the spirit confirming it was true. And then I, on my mission for the Church, I was in Chile and I had a couple experiences that really bowled me over where I felt the spirit so strong that I would have called myself at that point, having a knowledge that it was true. Like I felt like God had shown me, given me knowledge that there really is a Christ and Redeemer.

And that he really did restore His gospel on the earth and that I was part of that as the missionary force of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. So I came back from my mission with that that, right? I was armed, with I felt sure about my membership in the church. I felt sure I wanted to be the father of the family and I was worried if writing would make that possible. Right? Because my conception of writers had kind of been sort of what you do for living is you starve.

And and and I remember like trying to think of that pitch to a girl, like Hey, you want to want to go catch a movie with me? Like, because if, you know things work out, we'll starve.

You know? Like, it'll be great, you know, and if we have kids, they'll starve too, you know, it'll be awesome. We can maybe, does your parents have an open basement or whatever? That's one of the prerequisites for dating me.

Like, I had that feeling, right? Like, this feeling of like, I feel like I'm like, pitching this horrible like, Awkwardly yeah I'm thinking, what, what am I, you know, I've got all this potential, but I'm thinking, what we'll, we'll put all our money on fantasy books that I'm going to make up, you know.

It just sounds like a husband who may live in the garage, you know, um, and, and I really was kind of self conscious about it and it played it kind of close to the vest. I wasn't really open about my desire to write books because it just didn't seem like super viable. Like a way to make a living. And I remember going to, I'm went on a date with, one of, one of my first dates with the girl I married, whose name was Mary and I went on a date with her. And I remember she's like, what do you want to do with your life? Oh, here's the question, here's where, here's where she quits. You know, date three or whatever. And, and she, and I said, well, I said, you know, I'm probably gonna major in public relations. I was majoring in public relations because it gave me a background so I could write, do business writing or something, you know, when I got out of school. So I'd still be writing, it had a business application. Minor in English. I said, maybe after I'm done, I'll get an MBA or something.

Because that seems legitimate. Official breadwinner kind of job and she's like, well, you don't sound very excited about that. And I said well what I really want to do is write books. She was like, then you should write books! I was like, we should get married then.

Because apparently, you have no idea how life works.

You're naive enough to pledge myself to eternity. Like, she, and then here's the thing: She wasn't naive, she just was that kind of person who thought, if you have a dream, you should follow your dream. She'd kind of been raised that way and she actually believe that way. And she'd seen me write.

And, and, and, had some faith that maybe I could succeed at it. And that was really rare back then. I mean even teachers, people who are supposed to mentor and encourage you towards your goals, they were kind of like, yeah, but not that goal. Really, I legit had some teachers who are like, Yeah, you know, like, don't, don't, don't be a writer, Brandon, like you've got so much potential.

And like, it really made me feel like I was striking off on my own to be a write. Yeah and here's the thing. We assess ourselves and we try to see where we could succeed. Here's a little bit about how I assess myself. Like, in high school I was reasonably tall. I was tall kind of young, you know, I'm six three now. And a lot of people say, hey you should do basketball. And I paid

attention to how to play basketball and inside. I was like, no, that's not for me because I'm not very coordinated in that way. Like you know I was, I was, reasonably tall, not freakishly tall not incredibly tough. Reasonably tall and that was about it. Like, dribbling, ball handling, I wasn't very good. And, and so I was like, if I put my all into it, maybe I could be an okay basketball player, but if I was gonna put my all into something I didn't want to be okay. If I was gonna put my all into something I wanted to be outstanding.

And so for me, as I assessed myself, I thought, writing was the thing where I could put my all into it. I thought, that's where I had my highest ceiling. My most talent, where if I fed that talent that was where I could be most outstanding.

You know, I didn't know if I was sure I was right about that. That's just what I believed about myself. And it's tricky because you know, like, if your kid wants to be a movie director, the tendency would be, wow, that's really hard to become a movie director. You sure that's what you want? And for Steven Spielberg the answer was yes. You know, he became 100 multi millionaire guy because he became a director and if, he become you know, a toothbrush salesman, that wouldn't have been as good a choice for him. And so like, so that's the question we're always asking like, am I, in this field am I a Spielberg? Right? In this field am I am I JK Rowling? You know, like like can I really write something that will have broad appeal and where I can make a better living here than than elsewhere? And so anyways, I would, that was my wrestle, like, and I'm the kind of guy, where it's hard to make a choice when, if I'm worried it might not be the right choice and I was worried that writing might be a selfish choice and it might not be the right choice. But something in my heart told me it was, and the fact that I just liked it so much and I thought, if I like it this much, maybe, maybe I'll eventually get really good at it.

But it made it a miracle when I met a girl who kind of gave me permission to chase that. And so we did get married and for the, we got married right at the end of college.

And right after college kind of her gift to me was, hey, you want to be a writer, we don't have kids yet, I'll work a normal job and you write. Let's see what happens. And that was a huge gift, I'll be grateful to her forever.

The first Fablehaven is dedicated to Mary, who made writing possible and for good reason because she really kind of did. And, and it took that time and I wrote what ended up becoming Beyonders. It was a book that at the time was called the other end of the hippo.

About a kid gets swallowed by a hippo into another world, and has all these adventures. It was so quirky, I wasn't writing with much of an audience in mind I was just trying to write a novel that

I thought was cool. And I think I succeeded in writing a novel I thought was cool. It was the first time I wrote something was like, wow, this, I can put my name on this and push it and get behind it. And in the end, it was really frustrating. In fact, I remember we were living in my uncle's house for a time, Uncle Tuck just away.

But he opened his home to us. We were living in his house as newlyweds for a time, for a couple years right after graduating and I was so worried that was going to be the nicest house I ever lived in.

I felt pretty sure that when he, you know it was an upper middle class suburban, like nice enough that as I thought I may never live in a place like this again. Like if I become a writer, you know, like, it may be duplexes and apartments. That would have been okay, but like I remember being kind of bummed that maybe my nicest house was, was that first house.

But he let us live there and and I wrote *Beyonders* there. And after I wrote *Beyonders*, "Other End of the Hippo," I started submitting it for publication and just nothing was happening and I was getting No. Not even a nibble, right? Like, not even a response.

And I, you know, I've gotten my writers market was sending it to every agent and publisher that seemed like it was appropriate.

And yeah, I mean, I just, I didn't even I didn't even get nos.

I just nothing which is almost worse than a no, right? Just like dead sounds as if you didn't even send anything as if, as if that year you just wasted nothing because no one even had an answer back for you.

And I was like, you know what, like I had had a lot of success with my writing in college in that I wrote for a company troupe called *Divine Comedy* at BYU.

And I was their head writer for a bunch of years and wrote a bunch of great skits and proved to myself that I can entertain an audience with my with my writing and learn to write tighter, learn to write better. But this, this no answer thing from the publishing world really made me second guess all that.

And I remember one night I had learned this, I learned that sometimes when we're in need of an answer, one of the simplest ways Heavenly Father answers us, it's just like a yes or no, you

know. And sometimes you can go to him with a question. And sometimes you can, if you really open yourself up to here, you can sometimes just feel like a yes, a yes feeling inside.

Least, at least that's part of how I communicate with God.

And I'd learned how to feel that yes answer. Like yes the Book of Mormon was true, yes, you should go on a mission and I was looking for that yes answer about my book. Will this book ever get published or am I doing something futile? And, and I remember kneeling down in in that house that my uncle was letting us stay in, and very powerfully I got a yes, this book will be published. And boy, I just thought all my troubles were over at that point because I heard, I thought, yes, this book will be published. And for some reason I jumped to the conclusion that that meant, yeah, (inaudible) you know what I mean? And I think we sometimes do that with answers. We, we get an answer. The Lord maybe gives us a word or tells us something and then we start building our own expectations on top of what's been said.

And so I remember for the next two weeks I was flying high, pretty sure that things are about to bust wide open. I had had answers from God before and they had they had always felt like it led me on a good path. And so I was really disappointed when weeks went by, months went by, still nothing, no sign that it would that would ever be published.

And we reached a point where we were no longer living with my uncle, my wife was expecting our first kid, and it was time for this little window of being Mr. Writer Brandon to close and, and I really thought if I can't do this when I have this full time chance, you know, after college, my skills are fairly sharp now and if I can't make this go, maybe it'll just never go, right? Like maybe it'll never work. And so I Well I had a little bit of a wrestle there. Like, do I like writing more or do I like my family more? Because I really thought like, if I put on this dad hat and make it about the family that might be it for my writing career. And and I was like, would I make that choice? And the answer inside was yeah, I'll make that choice.

My wife has given me this time to give it a shot. It was more than generous and as, like, you know, maybe I can keep writing along the way, who knows, maybe they can do some work on the side and you never know. It doesn't have to totally die.

But I but in my heart of hearts, I kind of thought the dream was maybe dead once I got that full time job.

So I had to look for a full time job and figure that out. We were no longer living with my uncle, we were, we were now in a duplex we were renting and we And the baby was, and I needed to



be able to pay for everything. And so I remember yeah, we were actually at the time before the duplex we were in a little condo is where we were.

So we're in this little condo, and I had gotten a job teaching English in southern Utah, no teaching English like not like teaching English as a Foreign Language, being an English teacher at a high school, a Navajo high school on the Navajo reservation. It was so far south in Utah the only way to get there was through Arizona.

I mean this place was called Navajo Mountain. It was beautiful, but it was kind of in the middle of nowhere, as far as like, it was off the map. It was 45 minutes from Navajo Mountain to a gas station. It was an hour and a half to grocery store.

That was over pretty rough dirt roads and you could run out of gas going to get gas kind of thing. Like, it was, it was really really out in the middle of no nowhere. This high school at Navajo Mountain, it was pristine, it was beautiful. This little jewel like, it was a very nice little high school, so I would have had that would have been my little world, you know, teaching English there. And my wife is pretty adventurous and so she was up for it. So we did it, we, we decided to go to Navajo Mountain and teach English And be an English teacher and I thought, hey, we're out in middle nowhere, I can maybe write on the side plus it'll be, you know, I hadn't trained to be an English teacher. And so to become an English teacher if you didn't train to be an English teacher is what's called an alternate route to licensure and you can go if you got your degree in a related field like public relations, you can go teach school and kind of an outlying area and work do classes online and become an English teacher that way. And I just thought, you know my PR major, I liked public relations, but was like I don't know if I want to do PR, maybe I'd rather teach English.

And so with my own logic that's what I had chosen. And, and and I gotten the job and I had a letter I had to sign and send back in and then it was official. And so the night before I went down to take this job, I just felt like I needed to say a prayer.

And so I, I just wanted to get that yes answer that, that yes confirmation, because I was taking my, you know, expecting wife into the middle of nowhere.

And I wanted, I want to just make sure that that was an okay choice, that you know, that nothing would be messed up with the childbirth, because of it, you know, or that it would, would be a good choice for our family.

It made sense to me. I'd been looking for a while to find a job and it was like the one that that felt good that I found. And so I knelt down, I prayed, I just wanted that yes answer, just that yes confirmation was a feeling that I'd learned to recognize and I couldn't get it.

And I said, Okay, well, I gotta sign this thing and turn it in tomorrow, Heavenly Father. So I'm just going to keep asking until you tell me. And midnight came and went, and I still didn't get that answer that I was looking for, that confirmation.

And and to some degree, I could have been, like, oh, you're just leaving this alone? Like, just like no answer, and just do what you think? But then I flipped the questions and said, am I not supposed to go down there and I finally got that pretty strong yes. So that like, what I had learned recognize as a yes and you're not supposed to go down there.

That, that was a problematic answer because I I had been not working for like a year and a half now after school working on these books, right? Writing, writing what became Beyonders and what became about half of the sequel after Beyonders.

And I was like, now what am I going to do like, turn around to my wife turn around to my family and say, turns out, Heavenly Father doesn't want me to have a job. He just wants me to I think he has me on the, the house, house husband path to the celestial kingdom and, and, and I just was not comfortable with that. I was not comfortable telling her that I got a no answer. But I did. So I woke up, I woke up my wife, first thing I did was, honey. I feel like we're not supposed to go down there.

Um, would you please say a prayer of your own and see if I'm crazy. And so she got up, she prayed and she felt the same way, which was a huge relief because at least the key person who was my wife felt like, yeah, it seems like God is saying that, and as you know, in my heart as I don't want this to mean I'll never get a job. It's just for some reason this isn't the job.

And I was like, honey, like, we looked so long and hard for this job, is, is another job just going to come along? And I felt the spirit say yes. And I wasn't even praying when I, when I said that, almost said it facetiously, but I felt the Spirit said yes.

And so the next day comes. And sometimes when the next day comes, the revelation you got or the spirit you felt seems really far away.

And this was, it was a little bit like that that that morning, like I was, I was like was real last night? Like, am I really gonna turn down like, one the prospect? This kid's coming soon. And is

this wise? But I had an experience in my life earlier once where I didn't follow a prompting, and it really kind of blew up in my face and it hurt.

And, and so I was like you know what, if I'm going to bother to ask and he's going to bother to answer, I better do what he says. And so I did what he said. I, which means I denied the guys and I'm so sorry that I wasted your time. I'm so sorry that I came down to, I'm so sorry that it was that I kind of wasted your time with this.

But I'm not going to take the job. I called them up and told them, I'm really sorry it just doesn't feel right. It's not going to work for me.

That was definitely for me going out on a limb, and for a couple weeks I kept looking for a job, but when it came, it did just kind of come along. An old friend of mine from Divine Comedy called up, he'd gotten a job working at Excel Entertainment, which was a company that distributed LDS movies and marketed LDS movies, movies for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints' audience.

And, and they needed to build up a marketing team and I didn't even have to say a prayer and have to ask a question. Just kind of felt right when he offered it and so I took that job. And ended up actually using my public relations degree and, and went to work for Excel Entertainment.

And here's the thing. When I was working for Excel Entertainment that was frustrating. In some ways, and it was great in some ways. It was great because I was learning all about entertainment marketing. It was a small company and when they saw that I was good at writing I became in charge of all their marketing.

I'm writing for that company. I wasn't paid well but the experience was terrific. I was getting lots of experience writing radio commercials and billboards and TV commercials and helping with movie trailers and, I probably couldn't have gotten more hands on marketing job that young than at that little entertainment company. And it was entertainment marketing, which is something I might have to learn if I was going to be selling books. Then, but I remember working there, I kind of felt my own mind, it felt like I was a surgeon in a butcher shop. I was like, I should be the guy creating the content, not the guy writing the marketing for the content.

And, and, and in some ways that was prideful, but also because it was my dream. And, and I remember like, trying to talk to God about it seemed like is there ever going to be a time when I can do the guy you know, right in the movie or writing the story, instead of the guy writing the

blurb on the back of the book and, and I remember at the time I was teaching Gospel Doctrine in church and we were teaching about Joseph on that week on a certain week. And I was driving home from work and the story of Joseph was reexplained to me in a way that, that helped me apply it to my situation and so I'll run you through it really fast. So we've got Joseph, right? Now we're talking Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat Joseph, right? Like the Joseph, who was the member of the 12 tribes. And he, son of Jake, son of Israel Joseph, and Joseph had a gift, he had a spiritual gift.

Gift of spiritual talent, a gift. And it that was that he could interpret dreams.

And as he used that spiritual talent, used that spiritual gift, he interpreted some dreams. And one of the dreams he interpreted was a dream that no little brother should ever interpret. Sort of.

where he told all those big brothers that someday they will bow down and worship him. And coming from little brother that's going to be hard to swallow for your big brother.

But he really was just honestly interpreting that dream, but his big brothers wouldn't have it. And they said, you know what, that's what you think, well, we're going to sell you into slavery and they did.

And they sell they sell Joseph into slavery and if you're Joseph at that point in the story from my point of view, you could be like, man, I really shouldn't have used that gift I really shouldn't have interpreted that dream. I really like this, maybe maybe following God or maybe using these spiritual talents, maybe they're just going to lead to disaster because guess what I'm sold into slavery.

But that's not what he did. He got sold into slavery, ends up at Potiphar's house decides, I'm going to be the best slave ever.

I'm just going to be the best slave and he was. He was the best slave ever, Potiphar makes him like the head slave, And, and, and his life maybe gets a little bit of meaning and purpose back as he is at least kind of in charge of the slaves for Potiphar.

But then it goes, it gets another curveball. Because Potiphar's wife thinks Joseph's super cute and she, she puts the moves on him and Joseph did the exact right thing. Like if you're going by the book.

Trying to be a good man and sticking with God, he did the exact right thing. He fled the situation and didn't want to have anything to do with another man's wife. And for doing that, he ended up getting wrongly accused and sent to jail.

Right? And so if I'm Joseph at that point, I'm like, nice guys finish last for sure. Nice Guys finish last. Now, now I get it.

And like, and maybe you can make the argument that yeah, maybe I shouldn't be trying to be so good. And maybe I shouldn't be trying to like, stay close to God because it seems like the more I do the worse it gets. And a little bit, it was getting worse because like, probably the only place worse than being a slave would have been getting chucked in jail.

So now he's checked in jail and Joseph did not do what would be tempting for the natural man to do which is to give up. Instead, he said, I'm going to be the best prisoner ever.

And, and he was the best prisoner ever and became head prisoner, more or less, right? And so you've got this guy who who stays faithful even through really hard things and And as he's in jail, some, some, some or the fellow prisoners come in and they have had dreams. Now again, if you're Joseph and people are having dreams, that you've learned that using this gift can sometimes come back to bite you. But he keeps doing it. He interprets their dreams. One of you is going to get freed, one of us going to be executed and his dreams come true.

Exactly as predicted. He really did have the Spirit with him. He was really giving true interpretations to these dreams and the guy that got out, the guy that lived goes and tells Pharaoh, hey there's this guy that can interpret dreams, and he didn't do this immediately, this took time, he's in jail for years still, right? But like, Pharaoh reached a point where he's got this dream that he really needs interpreted and nobody can it. Not his wizards, not his whoever. He's like can interpret this dream? And the guy remembers, hey, there was a guy in prison who was really good at interpreting dreams.

So they bring Joseph out of prison, he hears Pharaoh's dream. He still is willing to use his talented gift and he's able to tell Pharaoh, you know what this means is that there's going to be seven years of prosperity, followed by seven years of famine.

And Pharaoh was like, what do we do? Well, if you store up during the prosperous time, you can survive the famine and Pharaoh just, Pharaoh in his gut, in his heart, he knows Joseph has given him a true interpretation, and here's the thing, like Joseph, though he went through all this hard stuff and it looked like God was punishing him like crazy, it looked like he's being punished

for doing what was right. It's just God moving him into the right place at the right time, so that he can use his specific gift, his specific talent to save that whole part of the world.

You know, and save that part of the world that stretched beyond Egypt to where his family lived and he really saved that whole part of the world by helping them store, store up food during that prosperous time to be ready for the famine.

And there's nothing better Joseph could have done with his life. There's nothing better Joseph could have done his gift and God knew that. God put him in the right place at the right time.

And so when I saw that story that way. I kind of almost felt like the spirit was saying, like have faith. You might feel like you're in prison right now.

You might feel like you're not doing exactly what you want to be doing right now, but have faith that God might be moving you around and bringing you in the right place. And it so happens that Excel Entertainment got purchased by Deseret Book. And Deseret Book had a division that was just starting called Shadow Mountain and Shadow Mountain's goal was to create mainstream books for the mainstream public, just, just with the only thing really truly LDS about them was that they were kind of clean and had some light in them.

And, And, some of the people at Excel knew I had written a book and said hey you should check out this book this guy wrote, and, and a guy at, at Shadow Mountain named Chris Schoebinger took a look at that first book I'd written. And he didn't want to buy that book. And he probably shouldn't have because it really wasn't written for a clear audience.

But he said, I like how you write and I see potential in it, and he was the first editor who sat down with me and said, what else do you have? We want to see something else. And I pitched the idea of a secret wildlife park for magical creatures.

But he liked that idea, I was so excited that the editor liked it, that while working a full time job. I wrote it in about five months, that was Fablehaven.

As soon as I turned it in, they liked it. And that, from that point on, like a charmed path where I mean, since then, I've written like 17 New York Times Bestsellers. A few of them have hit number one. Many of them are international bestsellers, almost everything you could hope for out of a writing career has already happened for me as far as millions of readers, millions of books sold. I actually live in a house, you know what I mean? Like not an apartment. And was able to provide really well for my family.

I have a testimony that the Lord will use, if you make yourself available to him, and are willing to serve him and are willing to kind of go where he leads, kind of let that, be kind of open to it because where he leads might not make sense at first. It didn't for me.

That the Lord will lead you to use your best talents in cool ways to lead you to do things better than you could do if you just trusted luck in your own data or intellect, you know, if you want to conquer according to your strength, you know, crock pot prosper according to your genius or whatever, you can do that. But if you will lean on God, He will let you do much more than than your natural talents would have allowed because he'll, he'll organize things, where you'll kind of be in the right place at the right time. And he'll help things develop in a way that you just couldn't have planned on. on your own.

And an important part of that is this. I feel like as, as people who are disciples of Christ who know him, know of him or just trying to really know him. It's so important that what we put out into the world has light in it. That it has light. And I'll tell you the truth, I pray over every book I write that I can find ways (inaudible) to put some light in it, right? Because with fiction, we're making up a story, right, the story is made up, but we can use fiction to say true things, even in a made up story, right? Stephen King has a pretty famous quote, fiction is the truth inside the lie.

And you know we make up a story, you can say really true things about courage and bravery, or truth or, you know, all sorts of stuff about human nature about the human heart.

And I still get to write stories that have action in them, that have scary parts in them, that have funny parts in them.

But it's okay to have darkness in a story that's okay, it's about what are the characters doing against the darkness, right? And so like for me, and this isn't necessarily for you, but for me, and I would say for you, make sure as a creator of content, you think really hard about how how proud you are to have your name associated with that content, right? Like, like is it, is it the kind of content we could be like, like we feel good in front of your kids that your name's on that content or feel good in front of your, your best friend that your names on that content. Or feel good in front of your Savior that your name's on that content. Because I'll tell you, it's really important, I promise you, it's really important.

At first it seems like the only thing that mattered was just getting something published and guess what, after you get some stuff published and have some success at it and you you much more

go, what am I, what am I publishing? What am I putting there into the world, is it doing good, or is it not? And I'll tell you that that as I've become more and more serious about asking Heavenly Father to help you put light into any story I write, I always find ways. There's always ways to tell almost any story I can think of or that I would want to tell and have some light or some goodness be part of that story so that the overall impact of this story can have some positive takeaways, you know, even if it's fairly scary or adventurous or whatever I'm trying to do. I feel really grateful that I was first published at Shadow Mountain. I was encouraged there to write kid-friendly stories, and that helped me really zero in on this concept. I think God had me start there, partly so that I would zero in this concept of writing stories that had some light in them no matter who I write for, no matter who my publisher is. I've been published with Scholastic and Simon & Schuster in addition to Shadow Mountain. I always try to make sure my story has some light in it. And that's just according to my own judgment, right? I'll say one more thing, and this is, like, if you are serious about wanting to be successful in life in any capacity and especially successful as a creator, don't forget to have the Master Creator on your side. He's the best there is at it.

As you pursue being a good writer, you can succeed in learning things that will help you be a better writer. And sometimes, that's to the detriment of other aspects of your life.

Because when we hyper focus on most things, it's to the detriment of other parts of our life. But I promise you that if you focus on coming to Christ and focus on making Him the center of your life, that elevates everything else, including your writing.

And for me to the degree that I've been really serious about trying to take up some of His invitations, like to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling before Him, to try to know that He's accepting my offering of discipleship and that He's accepting the covenant that I made, that I made with my baptism, as I get closer to Him, I feel his help in my work and I feel my capacity increase. And so I will testify that if you want to be successful as a writer, stay close to the Savior. And I'll say that, actually, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.