

# Writing is Reverence: A Latter-day Saint Christian Perspective

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Oh, I guess it's time to start. Sorry. I got caught up. I was reading from some of my personal journal here, so ... It's pretty good. Would you like to hear a little bit of it? Maybe later. My name is Gideon Burton and I teach at BYU and I want to talk to you about writing as reverence.

And really this is just an excuse for me to talk more generally about the connection between our spiritual lives and our literary lives.

I have a document that I'll share with you, a little bitly link that I'll put up, and it will take you to a document that links to everything else that I have, all the resources I'm going to mention. So that's that.

But let me tell you briefly what I want to do over the next 40 minutes. First of all, I want to just say that this session is not about professionalizing your writing. It's not about craft, per se.

But it's really about reenvisioning your writing life within your spiritual life, or vice versa. And so if there were some genres, this is going to be more associated with—it's going to be creative nonfiction.

Maybe life writing in general, a memoir, that sort of thing. But I'm hoping that this sort of information is a broad use for any kind of writing that you may do because anything you do with the written word can be infused with some aspect of spirit. I'm glad this is a court sort of organization and occasion that allows for that kind of a discussion to take place.

All right, so there are three things that I'm going to talk about, and I made these sophisticated PowerPoints to outline what we're going to talk about today.

And it suddenly occurred to me that these might appear backwards to you. It's a good thing I have them on the document that I'm going to send you to soon anyway. All right, the first thing I want to talk about is I want to help us make an inventory of our spiritual and literary lives.

And the next thing that I want to do is I want you to claim your spiritual-literary inheritance. I'll tell you what that means.

And finally, I want to provide some very pragmatic ways that you can become more spiritually intentional in your writing.

All right. So we're going to range from kind of the historical and theological and lofty and that sort of thing to some very pragmatic things that I'd like to end up. All right.

So my very first point that I'd like to make. Oh, wait a minute, I was going to, first I need to share this document with you, of course. Sharing the document. There it is.

Okay. So. Writing is reverence. There are those three things that I just talked about, in case you're trying to read them backwards. You can now read them forwards. And because I have so much more to say than I can squeeze into 40 minutes, I have outlined things. I might hold forth on at greater length another time, but those are all sort of comprised within the links, the documents linked here.

All right, so first of all, do you have a sense of writing being something that is part of your spiritual life.

I wrote some things about this in my journal. I did want to quote a little bit from that to you. This is kind of in the spirit of Alma 5, right, where we have that great personal inventory about our spiritual lives. So this is kind of a spiritual inventory of our writing lives. So I put this in my personal voice referring to myself and invite you to think in the same terms. Does writing play a role in my spiritual life? Does my religion color or infuse my writing life? Maybe less through overt reference or ideas, but do my spiritual hopes or religious habits and practices affect what or how I write? Do my faith struggles, my moral weaknesses, my fears or doubts color my approach to writing or its content? Do I trust writing to be a vehicle for spiritual change before facing the hardest things? Has writing become sacred to me, something prized and preserved and defended like a covenant? Has my religious pursuit of writing jeopardized, perhaps, everyday Christianity, service, godly behavior? Have I allowed writing to become an indulgence or distraction, a dodge from better things like, I don't know, being a better person, being present

for people? And if writing is one of my gifts, have I accepted it fully? How can I lay claim to the spiritual powers and privileges of writing? I think those are some good questions.

Now I have written this document called “My Literary Spiritual Treasury” as a way that you could go create an exercise of gathering together those influences upon your spiritual life that had to do something with reading, writing, literacy, and literature.

Now I filled this out for myself, but I encourage you to do that for yourself using your own examples. You might borrow my headings or adapt them.

But I think it can be very helpful to build a respect for the spiritual nature of writing, to think about our past and hopefully our, you know, our recent past and think about ways in which our spiritual lives have been enhanced by ways of the things that we do with reading, writing, literacy, and literature.

So in my own case I’ve kind of tabulated my own writing. And let me just quickly say at this point that when we’re talking about our own writing, I don’t mean your published writing, per se.

I mean, things that you have written that matter to you, and in my own case far and away more things that matter to me spiritually that I have not published than those that I have.

And really this session is all about writing mattering on a level that it may at some point be published. But that’s not the main goal and I think that’s really critical.

I think you can really hamper the spiritual dimensions of your literary life if you’re making publication and, you know, your fame and glory become the end. Anyway.

So I have tabulated certain things that matter deeply to me. For example, this is my travel diary from when I went to India in 2004.

And I kept this with me everywhere as I went around this subcontinent and had this amazing experience. This is precious to me. If I ever lost it, I would cry a lot.

I have also done a lot with writing of sonnets. I have a whole sonnet website and my sonnets have been a way that I’ve been able to deal with difficult things and also to have a great deal of fun.

And when I talk about spirituality and writing, I don't want it always to be in terms of spirituality that has to do with solemn things and sacred things. I think within the LDS tradition, we're very open to seeing, to feeling the joy and the fun of spirituality and not simply, you know, more traditionally reverent sorts of views of spirituality.

Anyway, I don't have time to walk through all of these examples, but there are letters that I have received or that I've written that have been powerfully spiritual exercises for me or moments for me.

And there's a great deal of things that I have read. It's very hard to keep it to a short list, but I tried to do that. For example, this rather worn book of Emerson's essays was owned by my father. He was a sailor in the Pacific Theater when he was 18 in 1944 and he read all of this Emerson while he was aboard a Minesweeper in World War II. It's very precious to me, including the things that Dad underlined in this.

And I have other books as well that have become precious to me over time. Do you have even specific copies of books that have become meaningful to you, maybe because you've engaged them through annotation or something like that? Each one of these things I've listed here is a story, and any one of them could end up being a prompt for me to write further about my spiritual literary life.

Memorized passages, etc. I think another category interesting here is writing that's been read aloud. And a lot of these things that the focus is less on a writing product or artifact and more on a literary moment that's had a spiritual dimension to that. So you can think about watching my wife read stories to our grandchildren or I can think about the experience of a special meeting and a sermon that I heard that touched me deeply.

I do have scripture mentioned here, but I purposely very much limited it because I think we can kind of lapse into ways of thinking about scripture and talking about scripture that are not necessarily wrong, that are just more associated with traditional culture, especially within the LDS Christian tradition. So I'm not opposed to scripture. Of course it's deeply meaningful in a spiritual way, but I'm trying to take a broader view here and look at the spiritual nature of our literary experiences at large.

And quotations from scripture—excuse me, from literature and whatever other sources. Things that have stuck with me and that I've ruminated upon and maybe been the basis of lessons or talks that I've given but not necessarily in a religious context. Just things that I have savored and that it meant a lot to me.

Now I've also—and it's linked from this same form—created this personally meaningful literary experience set of writing prompts. And so if you look at that, here's something that you could do that I have my students do. It's generally yielded some really good material from them for them to work up writing great personal essays from.

Look this over. Experiences of reading literature privately or discussing literature or creatively composing it or memorizing it, sublime literary experience, foreign literary experience, literary within the musical and film, literature as a way of coping with things, theatrical experience, etc. You can look at any of those. And I've listed some examples of my own as a way of getting things going there.

I think that if you start to make an inventory of the various ways in which there has been a religious or spiritual dimension to literature or that literature has provided an excuse for a context for a spiritual experience, you'll find a wealth of things once you start to write them down.

And do that. Recognize you already have had a lot of literary and spiritual experience and that these overlap and that this could be even part of your identity and part of your character. I hope that you're willing to think in those terms and to own that identity of being a spiritual-literary person or a literary-spiritual person. All right, so back to my overall outline here.

The next thing I want to talk about is claiming your spiritual-literary inheritance. So this is going beyond your own personal writing and your own experiences with literature reading and literacy to much longer vantage point of the scope of history. And so if you click on that, "Our Spiritual-Literary Heritage," you'll see that I've outlined four different areas, and they are the Christian literary tradition, the Protestant literary tradition, the Catholic literary tradition, and then the LDS Christian literary tradition. Let me touch on each of those briefly. Broadly speaking, the Christian literary tradition, it starts with Jesus himself. In John he's introduced to us as "the word," right, the word of salvation, the word of hope and faith, the word as the great mediator. And language is a mediating force. And so it's not hard to map onto our religious, the centrality of religious as Christian doctrine that Jesus Christ himself and his mission and meaning. It ties in very closely to the literary. Think about this in terms of that Jesus is God embodied. So literature is an effort to embody thought.

And Jesus, his body had to die, he had to have that humility in order to be transformed and renewed.

And we as writers, similarly, have to allow for the things, the ways that we have embodied our ideas to perish, so they can be revised and reformed and transformed. I take that very seriously as an analogy; maybe it's not even an analogy.

But I think Jesus Christ, his very life and essential meaning, can certainly apply to us in terms of what we do with writing and literature.

Now there's so much to the general Christian literary tradition. St. Augustine in the fifth century and his efforts to draw strength from both the Christian and the pagan literary traditions and reconciling those. And his book "The Confessions," which is really the world's first autobiography, and he addresses his life's story to God, and so we have this confessional mode that's a literary mode that comes to us from a general Christian tradition. And there are so many figures in the history of Christianity that can give us inklings of the power of both religion and the word. Margery Kempe in the 14th century, I believe, was a medieval mystic. This woman who dictated her visions and inspired a lot of people, and they had a kind of radical and literary edge to them. Or we fast forward to the 17th century. We have the devotional poets John Donne and George Herbert, who were writing these beautiful ways of praising God and using poetry and meditations as ways of enacting their Christian life, not simply promoting it or illustrating it, but these are deeply personal. In fact, let me show you one of my little treasures while we're at this. I have a ...

I have ... I purchased in London near the British Library this 1639 edition of John Donne's poetry, and he's the one who wrote poems like "Batter my heart, three-personed God, for you / As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend." That wonderful holy sonnet. And I have this second edition from 1639, very precious to me. Anyway. But I digress.

We could fast forward in general Christian literary tradition to apologists, populists, like C. S. Lewis. And think of his Narnia series and also his many nonfiction general treatments of Christian theology, which remain very powerful to this day.

A very strong general Christian literary tradition is out there. But I'd like to further divide our Christian literary tradition into its Protestant and Catholic tributaries.

So from the Protestant literary tradition, there's this great centrality to scripture that—and they call it "sola scriptura"—we can through scripture alone have direct contact with God and that each person can find God through their own personal reading. It doesn't have to be mediated through a priest or some kind of organization.

And of course, Joseph Smith reading from the Bible is the perfect icon representing this idea that every person can have God's word, the Bible, in their life directly.

So we have this prizing of scripture and a personal connection with it. The Protestant literary tradition also emphasized telling conversion narratives as Joseph Smith did. What he did in writing his personal history is very parallel to what William Bradford or other Protestants wrote about within their own personal spiritual autobiographies. There was something that Protestants felt as though part of our working out our salvation with fear and trembling could be done through the pen, through actually composing ourselves, composing our spirits, by the way that we compose our words and our life's stories.

And of course writing a journal ties in with this as the Protestants emphasize that kind of interior importance of Christianity, reflection, the sacramental life and weighing our own virtues and deciding on what we need to improve upon as we look at our vices, etc. So journaling, telling, testifying of one's conversion in scripture—all of this is coming from the Protestant literary tradition very strongly into our own.

Now from the Catholic literary tradition. Well, first of all Catholics deeply appreciate artistic expression of every kind, whether it's stained glass windows or statues or beautiful cathedrals, etc. And of course, the Protestants like to criticize that, but just from a literary point of view, there's a kind of affirmation that you can find God through the artistic, and that includes the literary. So we have a tradition that, you know, Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel is this very respectful honoring of God as a creator, etc. And this can trickle into our general appreciation of the literary arts as well. But I'd like to call attention within the Catholic tradition to our, to the Catholic manifestation of ritual in form as being central to one's spiritual life. Now of course, ritual can go too far and become empty. Jesus was concerned about that with the Pharisees when he arrived.

But ritual and form can also provide people a structure for spiritual experience and an avenue for opening that. And one figure in particular that was good at this was Ignatius of Loyola, who I think he's 16th century. He composed these religious exercises that are kind of sort of a spiritual algorithm of steps that you could take to focus on the life of Christ in turn, even turn it into the stations of the cross, if you're familiar with that, which is part of Catholic ritual and tradition.

Part of what I want to do here is to suggest that we as LDS Christians can participate in these larger traditions, even if in some ways we define ourselves against those.

That's still part of our heritage. And perhaps we could learn a few things from our Catholic brothers and sisters about religious practices and even rituals. I'll talk about that more in the last part of what I'm going to say today.

All right, so now I want to talk about our LDS Christian literary tradition. Well, we got all sorts of things. I had to break it down to history and culture, scripture, practices, theology. Each one of these we have within our religious tradition—"our" meaning LDS Christian tradition—that are deeply tied to the literary. First of all, the idea that reading can lead to revelation, as Joseph Smith manifested so simply and wonderfully with his reading of James.

But there's also this great tradition within Mormon history of recording sacred things and publishing those things. And some of that's for missionary work, but some of that's for personal devotional purposes as well.

And along the way there's this enormous respect for language. I want to read a quotation to you. It's one of my favorite quotations, and this is from Joseph Smith. It was in a letter that he wrote. He's talking about him and ...

Anyway, I don't need to give the whole context. But in the middle of this letter that he's writing, he expresses his anguish at the limits of language. And yet, in the very act of doing that, he's appreciating the expressive powers of language, and he is enacting those powers in the very act of despairing about their abilities. It's both ironic and beautiful and sublime at the same time. Let me read it to you.

In the middle of this letter, he just sort of breaks into this prayer.

"O Lord, when will the time come when Brother William, thy servant, and myself shall behold the day that we may stand together and gaze upon eternal wisdom engraven upon the heavens while the majesty of our God holdeth up the dark curtain until we may read the round of eternity to the fullness and satisfaction of our immortal souls." Now here comes the part.

"O Lord God, deliver us in thy due time from the little narrow prison almost as it were total darkness of paper, pen, and ink and a crooked, broken, scattered, and imperfect language." Wow, that's the kind of humility towards language that allows language to become something powerful and to transcend its very limits, and I like the way Joseph Smith manifests that. Now if we've moved forward through the decades of Mormon history, we see an enormous effort to have a literary tradition. There are all these periodicals that were produced, and the various mutual improvement associations put on plays all the time.



And, of course, you have all kinds of traditions of speaking. The speaking was put into writing and circulated.

The Mormon people have been a very literary people and a very creative-writing-oriented people, though they didn't call it that at the time, as they encouraged one another to become better at writing. In fact, Orson Whitney famously gave a speech in 1888 where he called for Miltons and Shakespeares of our own and so both tied to these great writers from the past and tried to claim this as a privilege for Latter-day Saints into the future.

Now our Mormon heritage goes right back to the Book of Mormon. And this is something which manifests the importance of writing, of course, but not just writing. Personal writing, right? This is one thing that distinguishes the Book of Mormon from the Bible is that very personal voice.

"I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents." So many of the very powerful moments in the Book of Mormon come as they are recordings of personal and family experience. And so they've become opened up to having a broader importance.

Okay. The Doctrine and Covenants also is something that, it doesn't just record revelations. It manifests the power of language in this wonderful way. Let me see if I can pull up something about that.

I think I put this on one of my ... Oh yeah. I included a quotation from that here. I think this is just beautiful.

"The earth rolls upon her wings, and the sun giveth his light by day, and the moon giveth her light by night, and the stars also give their light, as they roll upon their wings in their glory, in the midst of the power of God." Now that is just poetry.

Although it's not written as poetry. It is very poetical. And there are many such passages. And there's this overlap between the literary and the spiritual that's just very manifest within a lot of LDS scripture. Now, of course, like the Protestants have preceded us, we Latter-day Saints have a very strong tradition of bearing testimony and also of writing in journals. This gets us accustomed to talking about, you know, bringing our lives, our beliefs, our emotions into verbal form and sharing those. Not every religious tradition has that degree of focus on the verbal, but we do.

And this makes Latter-day Saints generally better public speakers, but also ones who prize the written word more.

Okay, and within our theology, there are all kinds of things that help support this idea of being a writer. For one thing, Mormons emphasize that, you know, we are children of divine parents. We have this divine identity. We can become like them.

And because our divine parents are creators, we take that identity as well. And we also can and should be creators, as President Uchtdorf talked about nicely in a conference address at one point.

Latter-day Saints have the doctrine of agency and this idea that we should be anxiously engaged in good causes and to bring to pass much righteousness. And that means sometimes being a literary entrepreneur. I think about people like Margaret Young, who was a real entrepreneur, as she set forth with Darius Gray to tell the story of black Latter-day Saints through a trilogy of writings, or more recently when Margaret Young helped to produce a film in the Congo, a real spiritual literary pioneer for our day.

All right, so there are lots of things within the LDS tradition that lend themselves to us having a literary orientation. And so this is not foreign to us. It's just sort of part of living the gospel in the modern age. It is to recognize the power of the literary as part of our spiritual lives. Okay, now I want to ...

My third section I want to talk to you about, "Becoming More Spiritually Intentional in Our Writing." And this is where I want to actually suggest some very specific kinds of practices. Because we all know that we as writers, we need structure. We need motivation. And we need plans. We need, you know, algorithms, methods, recipes, and we shouldn't be afraid to explore some of those as a way of helping us get going. Even if, you know, they may seem to be ...

you know, some may work better than others for any given individual. So I have this set of literary-spiritual practices that I want to review with you. And some of these are going to seem corny or ridiculous. Fine. Let 'em go. But I invite you to consider any of them as ways of enhancing your spiritual intentionality about your literary life.

And now the first thing I've listed here is that you should wrestle with the word. And there's a long tradition of reworking scriptural passages in order to understand them and own them.

On my sonnet site I have rewritten many different passages from the Bible, and it's not to try to, you know, improve on scripture. It's a way of likening the scripture unto ourselves, of owning it. There's a kind of wrestling with language that can tie in with the wrestling with belief in God that can go together. And so I encourage you to consider reworking scriptural passages. Translate verses into another language or imitate scriptural passages as an exercise. Memorize scriptural passages that relate to your writing.

Okay, another thing, and this kind of ties in with the first section of my presentation where I was talking about ...

What was the first thing I was talking about? This suddenly left my mind. Good thing I have this note. Oh, making an inventory of your spiritual-literary life. So my second item here on the sheet you can see in front of you: "identify and gather your literary-spiritual 'friends.'" So more formally, then, try to curate a personal literary-spiritual booklist.

What are the 10 most influential books on your spiritual life? And you don't have to tell me what they are, but maybe you should actually make that list.

You could also gather and recopy quotations that inspire you, or that model good writing, and maybe that go together.

You could go back through different books that you've spent time with and maybe written in the margins or underlined, and copy out certain passages.

And, of course, you could find that text and copy and paste electronically, but sometimes I think actually handwriting things out gives you a way of feeling them. It slows down your thinking, and it can tie in with this sort of pondering that Christians can and should do.

So another activity in general is to be open and social about your spiritual-literary life. Now, look. A lot of spirituality thrives precisely because it is private, and it's sacred because it is not shared.

But consider sharing some of it. It can enhance that identity of being someone who's both scriptural or—excuse me, spiritual and literary.

One thing you could do, you could set up a virtual bookshelf on Goodreads, the book social media site. You could create a bookshelf called "books that changed me" or maybe "books that I keep rereading." And try to think of books beyond simply directly spiritual books or even scripture to think about the broad range of books that affect your spiritual life.

And I'm not saying that you constantly need to talk in testimony terms to the public at large online. But I do think that talking about the ways that books have affected us spiritually is maybe a more authentic way of sharing our faith in some of the ways that have been suggested to us to do when, you know, doing missionary work online or something like that.

You could post scriptural insights from literary sources or literary insights from religious sources.

You could join a book club. That doesn't have to be online, but there are online writing or reading groups that you can join.

Sometimes it's really fun to connect with others who are not of our particular faith tradition but who participate in that larger Catholic or Protestant faith tradition.

You could publicly journal your literary spiritual insights. I think Latter-day Saints have to be especially careful that they don't lapse into a kind of "in-speak" as though they were talking to fellow Mormons in a testimony meeting.

And that exercise of not trying to talk just among our tribe can be actually really helpful in making your spirituality more what may be less cliché, so we don't just lapse into sounding like we have a testimony. Anyway.

There are a lot of different things that you can do that I characterize as literary-oriented LDS practices, things that we may do anyway as LDS Christians, but we can apply them to our literary life. Have you ever fasted for your writing project? Have you ever thought about the promise of consecration applying to your current writing, even if your writing isn't particularly religious in its nature, not centrally so? You could ask your ministering brothers and sisters to serve you by listening to you explain or giving feedback on your writing project. Now you'll laugh at this, of course, but you'll have an answer if someone says, "Is there anything you could do for me?" And you could say, "Yeah, I'm trying to work out this essay and can I talk it through with you?" You might find they're really interested. They might actually give you some really good feedback.

Let God work through your literary abilities in ministering to others. I like to tell my students, the English majors that I have, that, you know, the gift of literacy is extremely powerful. And sometimes we forget the power in its simplicity.

When I was a bishop, I tried to every week write a couple of handwritten notes to ward members. And I think it mattered a lot, and I think that we sometimes only think in terms of public projects or publications or something like that. And we don't recognize that we can use our literary talents in those small and simple ways that can be just world-improving for people.

Think about, for example, the books that you may have receive—not books, but the letters that you may receive, personal letters and notes and how much they could mean to you. Well, start generating more of those and send them around. I mean, cast your bread on the water, and by “bread” I mean nicely written notes to other people.

Anyway, that's something. Yeah. Right. And send thoughtful thank you notes, personal letters. Write something literary that connects with the current “Come, Follow Me” curriculum and share this with ward members.

You could get into family history. It's a good thing to do. And you can make it engaging in a fun literary—My father did this.

He wrote a book of short plays, and I mean like two to three page long, very simplified plays, that dramatized moments from our ancestors' history. And then we use those as scripts in family night and it was great. Okay. You can do things as someone that has some literary ability within the structures of our faith tradition to enhance those in powerful ways. Recently I was involved in composing some hymns with David Sargent, a great LDS composer. And we don't know if the hymns we submitted to the new LDS hymn book will end up in that hymn book, but it almost doesn't matter, because the act of combining our talents together, wrestling through what we would really like to say in a thoughtful and literary way ... Wow. It's just very rewarding, in and of itself. If any of you want copies or hymns, I would send it to you.

Consciously use journal writing to repent, reform, and renew. I'm telling you, my brothers and sisters, that this has been one of the most powerful ways that I've been able to come to terms with my sins, with my aspirations, with the deep and obstructed love I have for my children, the difficulties of life. I've made a lifelong habit of using words to work through my issues. And if you haven't done that, recommit to it. And here's where I want to just quote from another place in my journal. Sorry if this is a bit of indulgence, but it's right on target with the topic here.

Let me just read two paragraphs. “Overall, I've come to know and trust the sort of thinking feeling that emerges here as I write in my journal. Not everything is poetry or revelation.

Of much of it I'm embarrassed. But over time, this writing has become a haven, both the writing and the written.

And revelations large and little are not strangers to my pages. My writing is an act of faith, of true long-suffering patience, watching for authentic moments and expressions to emerge.

And come they do. If I but look along these broken roads of language crudely fashioned long enough, some something always comes. I write to find the scripture ... "Excuse me, I can't read my own writing. There we go. Oh yes, I like this part. "I write to find the scripture inked inside of me outside of me.

And yes, just like that sentence there that I just wrote half crafted and half pondered.

Sentiments that I sort of knew take form and then take hold, both lifting and bringing needed balance all at once." There's some things about thinking that only happen in writing, and I could say the same thing about believing and struggling with spiritual realities.

And so I implore you to take that advice that you've had from your religious leaders and use your journals as part of your lifelong trying to become a disciple of Christ and a better person. It works.

All right, now I'm going to talk about some rituals. Now please don't laugh. Well go ahead and laugh, I can't hear you. But some of these are very strict structures. And I think sometimes as writers, it may do us some good to have those. So I'm going to go through a list of these, and by all means, ignore most of them, but maybe try one of them.

Okay. Prayer.

You could make prayer a focused part of your writing process. I mean, like, you say, I'm not going to write today if I don't kneel down and say a prayer out loud telling God what I want to write about and asking for his help.

You can make an affirmation. I tried this out. I actually thought it was pretty good. Can I read it to you? So this is linked from the document so you can find it.

I might say before I begin writing for the today, "Today I write in faith, with reverence for the miracle of language, and with determination to accept and submit to its craft.

I will be patient with the imperfection in my writing, and will try earnestly for my writing to be and do good for me and others.” I really like that. It’s kind of upbeat. Maybe I should say that to myself all the time and it will help me be a better writer, bring the spirit as I try to write.

Think about consecrating a location. Make your own personal sacred grove for writing. An actual grove might be problematic because, you know, there are bugs.

But have you set aside a special place, maybe a geographical location, a place in your home, a corner of your desk, maybe also a place in time, a scheduled time when you will be true to your writing habit? You might think also about rituals that involve your writing materials. Now I have over time decided to write in ink with a fountain pen. And I do not write in my journal electronically anymore. I do it on paper with a fountain pen. That’s part of my ritual, and somehow it puts me in the zone when I use that particular medium. I even kind of have especially colored inks that I love. Ox blood in particular. Anyway. Other things you could do. Hey, how about formally dedicating something, like, you could have a personal private dedication ceremony for your chosen writing location. You could literally pray for your pen to write good words.

Or how about saying prayer that your computer ... well, not that it won’t crash. But that you will use this tool well and won’t be distracted, because we can be so distracted.

You can have a ritual involving music. Now, music, some people just have to have silence in order to write. Others, maybe if you made a special “music for writing” playlist, it could really help motivate you as you did.

I think another ritual is to announce and report on your writing efforts. You can do this by talking to your spouse or friend, or you can do it online on social media and say, “This is what I plan to do today.” And follow up on that, or you can do another version of that. You could have a special writing ledger where you use a notebook or spreadsheet in which you register each of your writing sessions. I have another suggestion about audio accountability.

Now I want to end by talking a little bit about fixed-period projects. And these kind of structured things can also often be very helpful for writers.

Have you ever tried to do something like a writing sprint? Like NaNoWriMo, national writing month, National Novel Writing Month, where you write a 50,000 word novel in 30 days, along with half the world. Well, that’s an exaggeration. It’s really invigorating to know that other people are trying to meet the same goal of about 1700 words a day. There are other comparable

projects like Round of Words in 80 Days or there's the Ray Bradbury's 15, excuse me, 52 week short story challenge. There's this really interesting one called Continuous Creation Challenge where basically you commit to foregoing consumption of specific kinds of media and consecrating that time for your creative project. Hmm. What if you said, instead of Netflix bingeing for three hours a day, I'll only Netflix binge for two and a half hours a day, and I'll spend that other 30 minutes actually writing in my novel? I had a student who wrote a postcard every day for a whole year and sent these out to people. I got one of those postcards. It was so cool.

You could fill a specific journal of a specific length within a specific time. Something that I did was I wrote a sonnet a day for a year, and wow, that was hard, but it was so invigorating.

And, you know, you can only write crap so long before something half decent starts to emerge. So I get very excited to tell people about using some real discipline as a way of focusing.

And discipline is something that crosses over between the world of religion and the world of writing. We need to discipline our souls and our minds for both our eternal salvation and also for our writing projects. So let's bring those into the same room. Let's do them together.

All right, so there's plenty that I could have said that I didn't. I could elaborate on any of these at greater length. I'm going to leave some time now so that we can discuss these, but I hope these have been provocative or evocative for you in some way that gets you excited that you can reverence your writing and recognize how important it is for your spiritual life and vice versa. All right, I'm gonna stop right there. Hopefully you'll have some great questions. If not, I know that my future self will be attending, and he'll just blather on. All right. Thank you.