

Coming Together and Sustaining Each Other in Righteous Choices

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When I received the letter inviting me to speak, I read the title and my first thought was: Well, of course we should come together and sustain each other in righteous choices! That just seems like a no brainer. But as I thought about it more, I had to acknowledge that as women we don't always come together or sustain each other – and so the question is why not?

The apostle Paul was concerned about divisions among the saints in Corinth and I believe his advice to them applies to us today. In 1 Corinthians 1:10 we read:

*Now I beseech you, [sisters], by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*¹

I would like to look at each of these directions from Paul more closely.

First, he admonishes the saints: *that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you.*

When Paul directed the saints to speak the same thing, I do not believe that he was suggesting that we all think and be the same, but that we speak the same testimony. It is our testimony of Jesus Christ and the restoration that is the same – that is what unites us.

I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago back in the late 1980s, early 1990s. Mike and I lived in student housing on the south side of Chicago and attended the Hyde Park Ward. My first visiting teaching companion was Sister Cathy Stokes. She was the Relief Society president and a long-time south side resident. One of the first things Cathy had to teach me was how to parallel park! Later, my companion was Sister Nancy Johnson, a new convert to the church. I remember sitting with Nancy in the humble home of Sister Susan Walker as we visit taught her. Susan was an older, very gracious woman and had grown up in the South during segregation. Both my companion and sister Walker were African American, older, single sisters with whom – at least demographically – I had very little in common. Yet, as we sat and shared

testimony of Joseph Smith and the restoration, I felt very close to these sisters. We spoke the same thing – the same spiritual language. I loved them, and I knew that they loved me. In contrast, I didn't feel the same connection with my fellow students at the university – even though we were very similar in terms of race, age, education, and socio-economic background. We didn't share or speak the same faith and testimony.

Paul also told the saints in a letter to Rome:

*That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.*²

As covenant women, we come from all walks of life, all ages, marital statuses, incomes, education levels, race and ethnic backgrounds – but together, we speak the same simple testimony, we comfort each other and sustain each other in our mutual faith. Our testimony of Jesus Christ crosses all boundaries – political, racial, economic, national. We are the same, as covenant daughters of God. That doesn't mean we are the same in all of our life decisions, or even in how we live the principles of the gospel.

I remember as a youth attending a multi-stake Youth Conference at Southern Illinois University. Sister Ruth Funk, General Young Women's President at the time, was our honored speaker. I and another young woman were sent to Sister Funk's room to find out what color dress she was wearing for the evening so that the leaders could purchase a corsage. Sister Funk graciously invited us in and visited with us. As we talked about our challenges and concerns, what I remember most from the conversation, was when she said that the Lord wants us all to return to him, but not in a straight line – meaning that the Lord doesn't expect us to all be exactly alike.

We are individuals, united in our commitment to the gospel. We receive the same saving ordinances, but our life experiences are not all the same. One of our student secretaries in the department of sociology is in the nursing program. For one of her assignments, she had to visit with a family and do an assessment. I gave her the contact information for one of the wonderful sisters that I visit teach. The next evening, I was in this sister's home with my companion, for our monthly visit. This dear sister told us about the students coming the evening before, and mentioned that they asked about family transitions or stresses. She said that the students mentioned several, and were surprised when she said that she had experienced all of them – birth, death, job change, divorce, a child leaving home.

As my companion and I meet together with this loving sister each month, it is clear that our life experiences are very different. The challenges we face are unique. Our talents, strengths, weaknesses, and backgrounds may vary, but we come together because of our same faith, our same testimony, our same commitment to the gospel.

If we truly understand that what brings us together is our testimony of Jesus Christ, then, as Paul said, we will speak the same thing, and there will be no divisions among us as sister saints.

Paul further advised the Corinthians:

*. . . there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.*³

Our ward in Hyde Park in Chicago was very diverse, but I felt united with the Relief Society sisters as we cared for each other. I was disheartened to hear later from a friend in the ward, after I had graduated, and my husband and I had moved to Washington state, that divisions later arose among some of the sisters. The Hyde Park ward included long-time south side residents, as well as university students that were in the ward only a few years. At one point, there was a group of sisters, student wives in particular, that felt that their challenges and needs were so unique that they needed separate attention apart from the south side sisters. Some of these student wives felt the need to have their own Relief Society classes specific to them. They preferred to only socialize and visit teach each other. These sisters did not allow the gospel of Jesus Christ to unify them – but instead, being absorbed in their own needs, wanted to be apart. They felt they could only come together and be sustained by those they shared the same circumstances with – other young student wives. Focused on themselves, they could not see the strength and wisdom available to them by joining together with all the sisters in the ward.

As covenant women, we instead should be as the Nephites after the coming of Christ as recorded in 4th Nephi, *among whom there were not any manner of –ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God. . . . and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.*⁴

Sister Parkin, in her address entitled “Belonging Is Our Sacred Birthright,” said:

*Satan knows that sharing unites our sisterhood through the everyday and the eternities. He knows that selfishness will begin to destroy sharing, which destroys unity, which destroys Zion. . . . Bring your talents, your gifts, your individuality so that we can be one.*⁵

The apostle Paul further instructs us to be perfectly joined together. The Lord, in a revelation to the prophet Joseph Smith recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants said:

*I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.*⁶

Here is an example you can visualize regarding the strength that comes from being perfectly joined together. Here is a page from a phone book.

By itself, it is very weak and easy to tear. But on the Discovery Channel it was shown that if you interlock the pages from a phone book with those of another book it is almost impossible to separate the two books.

On MythBusters they drilled holes and put brackets and chains to secure the ends of the two interlocked books, and then tried to pull the two phone books apart with human power, but were unsuccessful. A pair of cars also failed at pulling the phone books apart. Last, they resorted to using a Sheridan light tank and an armored personnel carrier, which were finally able to pull the phone books apart. It took 8,000 pounds of force to pull the books apart, meaning that you could literally hang two full size cars from the interlocked books.

It is extremely difficult to separate two interlocked phone books due to the massive amount of friction between the pages of each book.⁷

This interlocking is similar to the command Alma gave the priests he ordained to minister to the people at the waters of Mormon:

*And he commanded them that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another.*⁸

Now think about the force of millions of Relief Society sisters from all over the world, perfectly joined together – their hearts knit together in unity. This room is just one small example of the power of women coming together. By the time you have finished ‘Scattering Sunshine’ tonight and tomorrow – there will be hundreds of fleece blankets, thousands of hygiene kits, school kits, and newborn kits, as well as other items prepared to bless and uplift others worldwide.

Perfectly joined together – we are unstoppable. Satan won’t have Sheridan tanks big enough to pull us apart. So how do we then become perfectly joined together?

Now first, I think that we as women have problems with the word -- perfect. We have false notions of what perfection is. In our society, we are constantly bombarded with messages about what we should or shouldn’t be doing as women. For example, you view advertisements, even as you drive along the freeway, telling you what you need to be perfect. These media messages are very different for women compared to men.

Watching television the other night, I learned that as a woman there are lots products I need to buy because: my hair isn’t shiny enough, my skin isn’t smooth enough, I certainly need to be thinner – that message is loud and clear, my floors aren’t clean enough, my clothes aren’t white enough (nor are my teeth), and my children just aren’t happy enough! The message is that I need help, because whatever I’m doing, it could not possibly be good enough. No matter how hard I scrub my floors, or clean my teeth – I’m never going to be perfect.

In contrast, during that same evening watching television, I learned that what men need is a BIG truck, lots of light beer, a large screen TV for watching sports, and to call their doctor for drugs if they think their love life needs improvement! The message to men is have a good time! Spend your hard earned money on leisure – fast cars, watching sports, drinking beer. Do you see a problem here? Advertising motivates women to buy things out of guilt, or a need to achieve some socially constructed notion of perfection. Men, on the other hand, are encouraged to buy things for pleasure.

In addition, social expectations regarding physical appearance are very different for men and women. The humor columnist, Dave Barry, captured this well in a column published in 1998 called: Men should look out if a woman asks, ‘How do I look?’ Mr. Barry wrote:

If you're a man, at some point a woman will ask you how she looks. "How do I look?" she'll ask. You must be careful how you answer this question. The best technique is to form an honest yet sensitive opinion, then collapse on the floor with some kind of fatal seizure. Trust me, this is the easiest way out. Because you will never come up with the right answer.

The problem is that women generally do not think of their looks in the same way that men do. Most men form an opinion of how they look in seventh grade, and they stick to it for the rest of their lives. Some men form the opinion that they are irresistible stud muffins, and they do not change this opinion even when their faces sag and their noses bloat to the size of eggplants

Most men, I believe, think of themselves as average-looking. . . . Being average does not bother them; average is fine, for men. This is why men never ask anybody how they look. Their primary form of beauty care is to shave themselves . . . [and] if, at the end of this four-minute daily beauty regimen, a man has managed to wipe most of the shaving cream out of his hair . . . he feels that he has done all he can, so he stops thinking about his appearance and devotes his mind to more critical issues, such as the Super Bowl.

Women do not look at themselves this way. If I had to express, in three words, what I believe most women think about their appearance, those words would be: "not good enough." No matter how attractive a woman may appear to be to others, when she looks at herself in the mirror, she thinks: woof. She thinks that at any moment a municipal animal-control officer is going to throw a net over her and haul her off to the shelter.

Why do women have such low self-esteem? There are many complex psychological and societal reasons, by which I mean Barbie. Girls grow up playing with a doll proportioned such that, if it were human, it would be seven feet tall and weigh 81 pounds, of which 53 pounds would be bosoms. This is a difficult appearance standard to live up to, especially when you contrast it with the standard set for little boys by their dolls. . . . excuse me, by their action figures. Most of the action figures that my son played with when he was little were hideous-looking. For example, he was very fond of an action figure (part of the He-Man series) called "Buzz-Off," who was part human, part flying insect. Buzz-Off was not a looker. But he was extremely self-confident. You could not imagine Buzz-Off saying to the other action figures: "Do you think these wings make my hips look big?" But women grow up thinking they need to look like Barbie, which for most women is impossible, although there is a multi-billion-dollar beauty industry devoted to convincing women that they must try.

I once saw an Oprah show wherein supermodel Cindy Crawford dispensed makeup tips to the studio audience. Cindy had all these middle-aged women applying beauty products to their faces; she stressed how important it was to apply them in a certain way, using the tips of their fingers. All the women dutifully did this, even though it was obvious to any sane observer that, no matter how carefully they applied these products, they would never look remotely like Cindy Crawford, who is some kind of genetic mutation.

I'm not saying that men are superior. I'm just saying that you're not going to get a group of middle-aged men to sit in a room and apply cosmetics to themselves under the instruction of Brad Pitt, in hopes of looking more like him. Men would realize that this task was pointless and

demeaning. They would find some way to bolster their self-esteem that did not require looking like Brad Pitt. They would say to Brad: “Oh YEAH? Well what do you know about LAWN CARE, pretty boy?”

Of course many women will argue that the reason they become obsessed with trying to look like Cindy Crawford is that men, being as shallow as a drop of spit, WANT women to look that way. To which I have two responses:

- 1. Hey, just because WE'RE idiots, that doesn't mean YOU have to be; and*
- 2. Men don't even notice 97 percent of the beauty efforts you make anyway.*

Take fingernails. . . . I have never once, in more than 40 years of listening to men talk about women, heard a man say, “She has a nice set of fingernails.”

Anyway, to be back to my original point: If you're a man, and a woman asks you how she looks, you're in big trouble. Obviously, you can't say she looks bad. But you also can't say that she looks great, because she'll think you're lying, because she has spent countless hours, with the help of the multibillion-dollar beauty industry, obsessing about the differences between herself and Cindy Crawford. Also, she suspects that you're not qualified to judge anybody's appearance. This is because you have shaving cream in your hair.⁹

This obsession with physical perfection is even more graphically portrayed in a Bizarro cartoon by Dan Piraro of a mother supposedly comforting her daughter:

It reads: Don't worry darling. If the DNA fairy doesn't make you beautiful, Mommy's doctor will.

Such social expectations are destructive. Perfection is not looking like women in advertisements that are paid to look happy, and are digitally enhanced so that they don't even have pores. These notions of perfection are absurd – yet they are so much a part of our daily lives that we take them for granted. We come to believe that it is natural for women to desire a shiny floor or great fingernails, and natural for men to not even notice.

Although we are influenced by the media and other social institutions we interact with, we are still agents unto ourselves. We are not victims of our socialization, but active in shaping our lives. As women, we need to step back and sort through these various societal messages or normative expectations, and determine those that are helpful and those that are hurtful. Those that really matter in the eternities, and those that are transient, irrelevant, or even destructive.

The apostle Paul, in a letter to the Colossians, described how as saints we should be:

And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.¹⁰

With charity and thankfulness – we create a bond of perfectness -- perfectly joined together. This is God's view of perfection – not the world's.

I have told the sisters in my Relief Society this – and I firmly believe it. Individually, we all have different talents and abilities. I'd probably say I'm maybe a 7 in terms of cooking, but a 1 or 2 as a seamstress. I have good organizational skills – maybe an 8 or 9, but my musical talent is probably more a 5. Some of you are great leaders, or teachers, or artists. Some are great cooks, organizers, nurturers. All of you excel at something – and when we all come together, we are a perfect 10! That I believe is what it means to create a bond of perfectness. To be perfectly joined together. We have individual talents and strengths, but together – we can accomplish anything the Lord needs us to do. And He needs us, dear sisters, now more than ever.

Finally, Paul instructs us to be *perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*.

It is the friction or tension between the phone book pages that creates a force that holds the pages together. As sisters in the gospel, our uniqueness as individuals can be a force binding us together or, can create contention that eventually pulls us apart. Being of the same mind does not mean we all make the exact same choices, but it does mean that we sustain each other in our decisions as individuals. There are only twenty-four hours in a day, seven days in a week. We all have the same amount of time to work with, but not one of us can do everything that needs to be done in that short period of time. We have to make choices. That is the theme of this conference – Choose ye this day. As covenant women, most of our choices are between multiple good options. We have to choose, because we are limited by our mortal bodies – by time and space. It is impossible to choose and do everything we want, so we have to prioritize based upon our individual talents and circumstances.

Sister Beck, at this last general conference said:

*A good woman knows that she does not have enough time, energy, or opportunity to take care of all of the people or do all of the worthy things her heart yearns to do. Life is not calm for most women, and each day seems to require the accomplishment of a million things, most of which are important. . . . But with personal revelation, she can prioritize correctly and navigate this life confidently.*¹¹

Thus, being of the same mind does NOT mean making the same daily choices. We have to pray and decide individually what is right for us and our family – what is right based upon our own life circumstances. Being of the same mind – DOES mean we support and sustain each other in the righteous choices we each make.

As a simple example -- in one of the classes I teach at BYU, in the past I have shown a documentary about a couple of inner city young men that try to improve their life chances by playing basketball. This documentary is rated PG-13 –there is one very vulgar word that is heard in a song one of the young men listens to. I would mute the sound during that part of the documentary in class so as not to offend anyone.

One semester, after I told the students we were going to watch this documentary next class period, I had a young woman come up to me after class with a question. She told me that she

had made a personal commitment to not watch PG-13 films. Now this was not a personal commitment that I have made – nor would be likely to make. I generally choose movies based on reading reviews and other information in addition to the basic ratings. Given her request, I had several options – I could dismiss her commitment because it is not something I would do. I could emphasize that I edit the film and there is no reason she can't watch it; or I could sustain her in her commitment, even though it is not a decision I would make. I chose to sustain her and told her that I respected her decision. I indicated it was fine if she didn't come to class to see the film and provided an alternative.

I believe it is possible to respect the righteous decisions of others, without necessarily making the same decisions ourselves. When we pray and receive personal revelation from the Lord about a decision, that does not mean it is revelation for others – personal revelation does not mean others must make the same decision. If my answer from the Lord was for me to follow one life path, and your answer was to follow another – we both can still be making righteous choices. We can both be doing what the Lord wants us to do.

To illustrate this, I share a very personal story. Everyone who interviews for a faculty position at BYU has an interview with a general authority of the church. Over fifteen years ago in my interview, I raised the question about me, a mother, being employed at BYU. The general authority who interviewed me did two very important things. First, he reaffirmed the principles laid out in the Proclamation on the Family. Then he said, “you and your husband need to pray to Father in Heaven and decide what is best for your kingdom – that is your family.” And then he said, “I am happy to recommend you to teach at BYU.”

I came away from that experience with a testimony that we each must individually keep the commandments. As we are obedient, keep our covenants, pray and read the scriptures – we will receive personal revelation regarding how we, individually, should apply the principles of the gospel in our lives. I believe that the Lord has directed my husband and me in the family decisions we have made together with His influence. And I also believe that the Lord directs, and will direct each of you in making decisions that are best for your kingdom.

We need to sustain each other in righteous choices, even when they are different from our own. How we work out family roles, manage our food storage, build faith, participate in genealogy, keep a journal, and so forth depends upon our individual circumstances. How we apply the principles of the gospel to our individual lives is dependent upon our ability to seek and receive personal revelation. Making such choices should not create contention between us. Instead, the differences we see between us should create a bond – they should be a source of strength. Sharing and celebrating our righteous differences – whatever they may be – provides greater resources for all of us to draw from. It fills our community well with a diversity of talent and abilities to move the Lord's work forward. What is gained in coming together if there is nothing unique to bring to the table?

Paul further explained in his letter to the Romans:

*Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.*¹²

The footnote to this verse indicates that to condescend, in the Greek, means conforming willingly with the humble. Hence to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, is to come together in humility, to not think that our choices, because they are ours, must be more righteous than the choices of another.

Paul further teaches us that:

*. . . we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.*¹³

We do not want to be resentful, thinking we are more deserving, as was the brother of the prodigal son. In his talk, *The Other Prodigal*, Elder Holland said:

*Who is it that whispers so subtly in our ear that a gift given to another somehow diminishes the blessings we have received? Who makes us feel that if God is smiling on another, then He surely must somehow be frowning on us? You and I both know who does this—it is the father of all lies. It is Lucifer, our common enemy, whose cry down through the corridors of time is always and to everyone, “Give me thine honor.” . . . As others seem to grow larger in our sight, we think we must therefore be smaller. So, unfortunately, we occasionally act that way.*¹⁴

I know that I have had feelings of jealousy at the recognition of others. Pride is something I have certainly struggled with. I remember as a missionary in Argentina, it seemed that at every zone conference, they always asked Sister Maughn to speak. They never asked me. I remember thinking, I’m as good a missionary as Sister Maughn, why don’t they ask me to give a talk? It reached a point where I actually felt some resentment. I prayed about this, and finally one day it dawned on me – this is not about you! Zone conference is not about you! It is about training missionaries and the mission leaders can call on whoever they feel inspired to call on. Whether or not you ever speak in zone conference is irrelevant. Just because you aren’t asked to speak doesn’t mean you are not a good missionary. Basically, the spirit told me to get over it; and of course, I never did speak at zone conference – I had a lesson to learn.

So to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, means that we willingly conform (or sustain each other) in humility. We become one in the body of Christ and if one member suffers, we suffer with them. If one member is honored, we rejoice with them.

Elder Pace, in an Ensign address said:

*I am convinced that when we obtain a witness of who we really are and possess healthy feelings of self-worth because of it, our joy in the accomplishments of others is magnified. When that joy is felt, we should share it.*¹⁵

Being humble and rejoicing in the accomplishments of others does not mean we should lack confidence in ourselves. Paul taught that we should be perfectly joined together in the same

mind and in the same judgment. Coming together in humility does not mean that we should wrongly judge others, or ourselves. Elder Pace explained that:

*To be humble is to recognize our utter dependence upon the Lord. . . . To lack confidence is to have feelings of low self-worth. . . . both pride and a lack of self-confidence cause us to focus excessively on ourselves and to deny the power of God in our lives.*¹⁶

Thus, we are overconfident when we think we can do everything on our own and don't acknowledge our dependency on the Lord. We lack confidence when we have feelings of low self-worth. Both extremes keep us from perfectly joining together. Overconfidence propels us to think we can do everything on our own – we don't need anybody else. This was the attitude of my oldest daughter, Mary, when she was in kindergarten.

One day she announced to me that she was going to move out and get her own apartment. Oh, I said, and how are you going to pay for it? I'll get a job, she replied. And who is going to hire you? You're five years old! Obviously -- Mary was, and still is, a very independent young woman. She is now grown and serving a mission in Brazil. She has learned over time that we all need the help of others – especially the Lord.

As a missionary, every email home she acknowledges her dependency on the Lord and recognizes that she can't do everything on her own. She recently wrote:

We just have to trust in the Lord and live the way we know we should. But we have to keep the commandments and our covenants, and trust in the Lord to take care of the rest. He knows what we're capable of. He knows what we can overcome better than we do. And He'll never leave us alone to do it. We always have His help.

Pride and over confidence can lead us to be like this brother – standing before Peter at the pearly gates in another of my favorite Bizarro cartoons:

Peter tells him: *You were a believer yes. But you skipped the not-being-a-jerk-about-it part.*

Self-righteousness and pride do not perfectly join us together in the same judgment. Humility is necessary. At the other extreme, however, humility does not mean self-doubt. I believe low self-esteem is generally a greater challenge for women, whereas being overconfident – is something I think men tend to struggle with more.

Think of the example Elder Uchtdorf gave regarding his and his wife's cooking talents. He said:

*When Harriet prepares a meal, it's a masterpiece. . . . The presentation of the food is awe inspiring. It's as much a feast for the eyes as it is for the sense of taste. But sure enough, no matter how perfect everything is, looks, and tastes, Harriet will apologize for something she thinks is imperfect. . . . she will say, . . . "Next time, I think it would be better if I used a little more curry and one additional bay leaf." Let me contrast that with the way I cook. . . . between fried eggs, even when they are greasy, and [toasted French bread], even when they are burned, when I cook, I feel pretty heroic.*¹⁷

Why do we as women so often see ourselves as inadequate, as always falling short?

Elder Holland notes that:

*... every day we feel allurements of one kind or another that tell us what we have is not enough. ... We are bombarded with the message that on the world's scale of things we have been weighed in the balance and found wanting.*¹⁸

Particularly as women, we are bombarded with societal messages that we are not good enough, that what we do is not important. Such feelings make it difficult for us to get along with each other.

One woman writer, in her article, *Why Can't Women Get Along?*, noted that secretly, we all have ideas of what the perfect woman is like; and when we see another woman possibly attaining even one of these attributes, out come the claws. But, she asks, is it jealousy of each other or a lack of confidence in ourselves? She relates the story of talking with a couple of her friends about the perfect woman – each describing what they thought the perfect woman was like. What she realized was that they were each describing someone the complete opposite of themselves. She said, it's us! It's not about what some other woman has that is stopping us from getting along with them. It's what we feel we don't have that is getting in the way. She writes: What women need to learn is how to truly appreciate themselves for who they are and what makes them truly beautiful. Until we get there, we'll never get to appreciating each other and building real friendships among ourselves.¹⁹

So why are women in particular so hard on themselves? Based on what sociologists call status characteristics theory, cultural beliefs about gender that give men higher status than women create different standards for assessing ability for men and women.²⁰ In other words, if the cultural messages that women in particular are bombarded with place them in the background, or in a position of inferiority relative to men – women will judge themselves more harshly than will men. Women will underestimate their abilities, whereas men are more likely to overestimate their abilities.

Some social messages of inferiority are direct – such as the message being targeted in a Bizarro cartoon:

The father tells his son: Son, you used to throw like a girl. Now you throw like a woman!

Being told you throw like a girl – is an insult, even for a girl.

Other messages are more subtle or even unintentional. Much of the work that women do is in the home or private sphere. Such work is behind the scenes and does not receive the same attention as work done in the public sphere. Even in the church, the work of the young men in the ward is much more visible than that of the young women. On Sundays we see the young men pass the sacrament, collect fast offerings, and home teach. The work of young women is in the background, and it is easy for them to feel that what they do is less important.

Commenting on this, Elder Maxwell said:

*We are accustomed to focusing on the men of God because theirs is the priesthood and leadership line. But paralleling that authority line is a stream of righteous influence reflecting the remarkable women of God who have existed in all ages and dispensations, including our own. . . . The story of the women of God, therefore, is, for now, an untold drama within a drama.*²¹

Throughout history, the story of women is less visible or yet untold, sending the societal message that the work women do is less valued than the work of men. Labor statistics in the US show that men and women in female occupations, such as teaching and nursing, are paid less than men and women in male occupations, such as business²² –in part because female (or more nurturing) occupations are valued less in our society.

Unfortunately, as women, we buy into these messages of inadequacy. As I served as the Relief Society president in my ward, I became increasingly aware that many talented and amazing women I came to know and admire felt that they were not good enough –they continually saw themselves as lacking.

A sociologist at Cornell University conducted an experiment in which men and women were asked to complete a task. Subjects did the task individually, and then after receiving their score completed a self evaluation of their abilities in this area. Before beginning the task, one group of subjects was told that there are no differences between men and women in their ability to do the task. In a second group, subjects were told that on average men have more ability at the task compared to women. Although all subjects received the same score for the task, there were large differences in self-assessment between the groups. When subjects were told that there was no gender difference in ability, both men and women assessed their abilities the same. However, when subjects were told that men on average perform better on the task, men had a more lenient standard and gave themselves a high self-evaluation. In contrast, women, although given the same scores, gave themselves a low self-evaluation.²³

These findings are similar to a study conducted previously by colleagues of mine in the sociology department. Jim Duke and Barry Johnson surveyed members of the LDS church back in the 1990s. Using a national sample of Mormon families, they asked both husbands and wives to respond to separate questionnaires about their religious practices. Respondents rated their church activity, scripture reading, frequency of prayer, and so forth. One question asked: if you were to die today, which of the three degrees of glory do you feel worthy to enter? What they found was:

*Men were more likely than women to believe that if they died today, they would be worthy of the celestial kingdom. Men were also slightly more likely to say their life closely follows the life that Christ wants them to live. Men therefore felt more confident than did women about their place in the final judgment, despite the fact that they rated themselves less religious than women on 26 of the 31 questions.*²⁴

Thus, the men had a more lenient standard for entering the celestial kingdom and gave themselves a high self-evaluation; in contrast, the women although they reported engaging more in behaviors such as church attendance and daily prayer, gave themselves a low self-evaluation.

Sisters, having the same judgment requires us to not buy into messages of inferiority or low self-worth. We should not judge ourselves more harshly or set unattainable standards for ourselves relative to others. We are just as capable, just as worthy. The work we do may not receive worldly recognition – but it is essential to the Lord’s plan. He knows our worth – and we need to believe Him.

Elder Faust, to the women of the church said:

*As I look into your faces I can feel your goodness. I commend each of you for your day-to-day works of righteousness. Even though your works may be known to only a few, they are recorded in the Lamb’s book of life, which one day will be opened to witness of your dedicated service, devotion, and deeds as “instruments in the hands of God to bring about this great work”.*²⁵

*Now I beseech you, [sisters], by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that [we] all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among [us]; but that [we] be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*²⁶

I believe Sister Hinckley said it best:

*We are all in this together. We need each other, Oh, how we need each other. Those of us who are old need you who are young. And, hopefully, you who are young need some of us who are old. It is a sociological fact that women need women. We need deep and satisfying and loyal friendships with each other. These friendships are a necessary source of sustenance. We need to renew our faith every day. We need to lock arms and help build the kingdom so that it will roll forth and fill the whole earth.*²⁷

Sisters, we have got to lock arms and change the conversation. We need to come together and counter the negative and defeating messages that the world bombards us with daily. We need to strengthen, lift, praise, encourage, and sustain one another in all of our righteous endeavors. We need to envelope our young women with messages of strength, hope, and courage – empowering them against social expectations that corrupt their divine nature and devalue their individual worth.

Relief Society should be our sanctuary. We should be able to come together in prayer and fasting, in testimony and faith, and in loving support of one another. No sister should leave Relief Society with feelings of guilt, isolation, or inadequacy. If we are perfectly joined together – what woman would not want to be part of such a society? We need all of us – young, old, tall, short, single and married – as Sister Parkin said: *Bring your talents, your gifts, your individuality so that we can be one.*²⁸ It is only then, united, that we can move the kingdom forward. Perfectly joined together we can be an unstoppable force for good.

*The Lord through the prophet Enoch commands: Choose you this day, to serve the Lord God who made you. Behold my Spirit is upon you, wherefore all thy words will I justify; and the mountains shall flee before you, and the rivers shall turn from their course; and thou shalt abide in me, and I in you; therefore walk with me.*²⁹

Let us walk with the Lord – together. Let us focus our sight on our divine potential and keep our heads above the daily fray of demeaning chatter.

Elder Pace, in a recent devotional address at BYU, quoted lines from Eliza R. Snow’s hymn, O My Father:

*When I leave this frail existence,
When I lay this mortal by,
Father, Mother, may I meet you
In your royal courts on high?
Then, at length, when I’ve completed
All you sent me forth to do,
With your mutual approbation
Let me come and dwell with you.*³⁰

Elder Pace then concluded:

*Sisters, I testify that when you stand in front of your heavenly parents in those royal courts on high and look into Her eyes and behold Her countenance, any question you ever had about the role of women in the kingdom will evaporate into the rich celestial air, because at that moment you will see standing directly in front of you, your divine nature and destiny.*³¹

Dear sisters, may we come together as covenant women, recognize our individual worth and create that bit of heaven now amongst ourselves. May we come together and sustain each other in our righteous choices, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:10

² Romans 1:12

³ 1 Corinthians 12:25

⁴ 4 Nephi 1:17,16

⁵ Bonnie D. Parkin. *Belonging Is Our Sacred Birthright*. Ensign, Nov 2004, 106-8.

⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 38:27

⁷ MythBusters. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOt-D_ee-JE

⁸ Mosiah 18:21

⁹ Dave Barry. “Men Should Look Out if a Woman Asks, ‘How Do I Look?’”, *Deseret News*, Sunday, February 1, 1998.

¹⁰ Colossians 3:14-15

¹¹ Julie B. Beck. “And upon the Handmaids in Those Days Will I Pour Out My Spirit,” April 2010, General Conference

¹² Romans 12:16

¹³ Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:26

¹⁴ Jeffrey R. Holland. *The Other Prodigal*, Liahona, Jul 2002, 69-72

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- ¹⁵ Glenn L. Pace, Confidence and Self-Worth, Ensign, Jan 2005, 32-35
- ¹⁶ Glenn L. Pace, Confidence and Self-Worth, Ensign, Jan 2005, 32-35
- ¹⁷ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Happiness, Your Heritage," Liahona, Nov 2008, 117-20.
- ¹⁸ Jeffrey R. Holland. The Other Prodigal, Liahona, Jul 2002, 69-72
- ¹⁹ Selena D. Robinson, Why Can't Women Get Along?, Associated Content, Dec 2008,
http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1221398/why_cant_women_get_along.html
- ²⁰ Shelley J. Correll. Constraints into Preferences: Gender, Status, and Emerging Career Aspirations. *American Sociological Review*, 69(1), Feb 2004, pp. 93-113
- ²¹ Neal A. Maxwell. "The Women of God," Ensign, May 1978, 10.
- ²² Stephanie Boraas and William M. Rodgers. 2003. "How does gender play a role in the earnings gap? An update." *Monthly Labor Review*, 126(3), 14.
- ²³ Ibid
- ²⁴ James T. Duke and Barry L. Johnson. "The Religiosity of Mormon Men and Women through the Life Cycle." In: James T. Duke, ed. 1998. *Latter-Day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and its Members*, Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, p. 318.
- ²⁵ James E. Faust, "Instruments in the Hands of God," Liahona, Nov 2005, 114.
- ²⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:10
- ²⁷ Marjorie Pay Hinckley. 2003. *Small and Simple Things*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, p. 133.
- ²⁸ Bonnie D. Parkin. *Belonging Is Our Sacred Birthright*. Ensign, Nov 2004, 106-8.
- ²⁹ Moses 6:33-34.
- ³⁰ "O My Father," Hymns, 1985, no. 292, verse 4; text by Eliza R. Snow
- ³¹ Glenn L. Pace. *The Divine Nature and Destiny of Women*. Speeches, Brigham Young University 2009-2010, 9 March 2010, p. 6.