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By Union of Feeling We Obtain Power with God

As we seek union of feeling, we will call down the power of God to make our efforts whole.

Gordon's mother told him if he would finish his chores, she would make him a pie. His favorite kind. Just for him. Gordon went to work on getting those chores done, and his mother rolled out the pie. His older sister Kathy came into the house with a friend. She saw the pie and asked if she and her friend could have a slice.

"No," said Gordon, "it's my pie. Mom baked it for me, and I had to earn it."

Kathy snapped at her little brother. He was so self-centered and ungenerous. How could he keep this all to himself?

Hours later when Kathy opened the car door to take her friend home, there on the seat were two napkins folded nicely, two forks set on top, and two wide pieces of pie on plates. Kathy told this story at Gordon's funeral to show how he was willing to change and show kindness to those who didn't always deserve it.

In 1842, the Saints were working hard to build the Nauvoo Temple. After the founding of the Relief Society in March, the Prophet Joseph often came to their meetings to prepare them for the sacred, unifying covenants they would soon make in the temple.

On June 9, the Prophet "said he was going to preach mercy[.] Supposing that Jesus Christ and [the] angels should object to us on frivolous things, what would become of us? We must be merciful and overlook small things." President Smith continued, "It grieves me that there is no fuller fellowship—if one member suffer all feel it—by union of feeling we obtain pow'r with God."¹

That small sentence struck me like lightning. *By union of feeling we obtain power with God.* This world isn't what I want it to be. There are

many things I want to influence and make better. And frankly, there is a lot of opposition to what I hope for, and sometimes I feel powerless. Lately, I have been asking myself searching questions: How can I understand people around me better? How will I create that "union of feeling" when all are so different? What power from God might I access if I am just a little bit more unified with others? From my soul-searching, I have three suggestions. Maybe they will help you too.

Have Mercy

Jacob 2:17 reads, "Think of your [brothers and sisters] like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you." Let's replace the word *substance* with *mercy*—be free with your *mercy* that they may be rich like unto you.

We often think of substance in terms of food or money, but perhaps what we all need more of in our ministering is mercy.

My own Relief Society president recently said: "The thing I . . . promise



Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

. . . you is that I will keep your name safe. . . . I will see you for who you are at your best. . . . I will never say anything about you that is unkind, that is not going to lift you. I ask you to do the same for me because I am terrified, frankly, of letting you down.”

Joseph Smith told the sisters on that June day in 1842:

“When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what pow’r it has over my mind. . . .

“ . . . The nearer we get to our heavenly Father, the more are we dispos’d to look with compassion on perishing souls—[we feel that we want] to take them upon our shoulders and cast their sins behind our back. [My talk is intended for] all this Society—if you would have God have mercy on you, have mercy on one another.”²

This was counsel specifically to the Relief Society. Let’s not judge each other or let our words bite. Let’s keep each other’s names safe and give the gift of mercy.³



Rexburg, Idaho, USA

Make Your Boat Swing

In 1936, an obscure rowing team from the University of Washington traveled to Germany to participate in the Olympic Games. It was the depths of the Great Depression. These were working-class boys whose small mining and lumber towns donated bits of money so they could travel to Berlin. Every aspect of the competition seemed stacked against them, but something happened in the race. In the rowing world, they call it “swing.” Listen to this description based on the book *The Boys in the Boat*:

There is a thing that sometimes happens that is hard to achieve and hard to define. It’s called “swing.” It happens only when all are rowing in such perfect unison that not a single action is out of sync.

Rowers must rein in their fierce independence and at the same time hold true to their individual capabilities. Races are not won by clones. Good crews are good blends—someone to lead the charge, someone to hold something in reserve, someone to fight the fight, someone to make peace. No rower is more valuable than another, all are assets to the boat, but if they are to row well together, each must adjust to the needs and capabilities of the others—the shorter-armed person reaching a little farther, the longer-armed person pulling in just a bit.

Differences can be turned to advantage instead of disadvantage. Only then will it feel as if the boat is moving on its own. Only then does pain entirely give way to exultation. Good “swing” feels like poetry.⁴

Against towering obstacles, this team found perfect swing and won. The Olympic gold was exhilarating, but the unity each rower experienced

that day was a holy moment that stayed with them all their lives.

Clear Away the Bad as Fast as the Good Can Grow

In the exquisite allegory in Jacob 5, the Lord of the vineyard planted a good tree in good ground, but it became corrupted over time and brought forth wild fruit. The Lord of the vineyard says eight times: “It grieveth me [to] lose this tree.”

The servant says to the Lord of the vineyard: “Spare [the tree] a little longer. And the Lord said: Yea, I will spare it a little longer.”⁵

And then comes instruction that can be applied to all of us trying to dig about and find good fruit in our own little vineyards: “Ye shall clear away the bad according as the good shall grow.”⁶

Unity doesn’t magically happen; it takes work. It’s messy, sometimes uncomfortable, and happens gradually when we clear away the bad as fast as the good can grow.

We are never alone in our efforts to create unity. Jacob 5 continues, “The servants did go and labor with their might; and the Lord of the vineyard labored also with them.”⁷

Each of us is going to have deeply wounding experiences, things that should never happen. Each of us will also, at various times, allow pride and loftiness to corrupt the fruit we bear. But Jesus Christ is our Savior in all things. His power reaches to the very bottom and is reliably there for us when we call on Him. We all beg for mercy for our sins and failures. He freely gives it. And He asks us if we can give that same mercy and understanding to each other.

Jesus put it bluntly: “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.”⁸ But

if we are one—if we can spare a piece of our pie or fit our individual talents so the boat can swing in perfect unison—then we are His. And He will help clear away the bad as fast as the good does grow.

Prophetic Promises

We may not yet be where we want to be, and we are not now where we will be. I believe the change we seek in ourselves and in the groups we belong to will come less by activism and more by actively trying every day to understand one another. Why? Because we are building Zion—a people “of one heart and one mind.”⁹

As covenant women, we have broad influence. That influence is applied in everyday moments when we are studying with a friend, putting children to bed, talking to a seatmate on the bus, preparing a presentation with a colleague. We have power to remove prejudice and build unity.

Relief Society and Young Women are not simply classes. They can also be unforgettable experiences where very different women all get into the same boat and row until we find our *swing*. I offer this invitation: be part of a collective force that changes the world for good. Our covenantal assignment is to minister, to lift up the hands that hang down, to put struggling people on our backs or in our arms and carry them. It isn't complicated to know what to do, but it often goes against our selfish interests, and we have to try. The women of this Church have unlimited potential to change society. I have full spiritual confidence that, as we seek union of feeling, we will call down the power of God to make our efforts whole.

When the Church commemorated



Provo, Utah, USA

the 1978 revelation on priesthood, President Russell M. Nelson extended a powerful prophetic blessing: “It is my prayer *and blessing* that I leave upon all who are listening that we may overcome any burdens of prejudice and walk uprightly with God—and with one another—in perfect peace and harmony.”¹⁰

May we draw on this prophetic blessing and use our individual and collective efforts to increase unity in the world. I leave my testimony in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ's humble, timeless prayer: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.”¹¹ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. “Minutes and Discourse, 9 June 1842,” 61, Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-and-discourse-9-june-1842/1.
2. “Minutes and Discourse, 9 June 1842,” 62, Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-and-discourse-9-june-1842/2.
3. See Cree-L Kofford, “Your Name Is Safe in Our Home,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 81–83; *Liahona*, July 1999, 96–98.
4. See Daniel James Brown, *The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics* (2013), 161, 179.
5. Jacob 5:50–51.
6. Jacob 5:66.
7. Jacob 5:72.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 38:27.
9. Moses 7:18.
10. Russell M. Nelson, “Building Bridges,” *New Era*, Aug. 2018, 6; *Liahona*, Dec. 2018, 51; emphasis added.
11. John 17:21.